

# Annie

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Jersey – November 2008

## **A Kidderminster Victorian Journal**

Based on the Diaries Annie Tomkinson  
of Franche Hall kept from 1884 – 1920.



ANNIE TOMKINSON



MICHAEL TOMKINSON

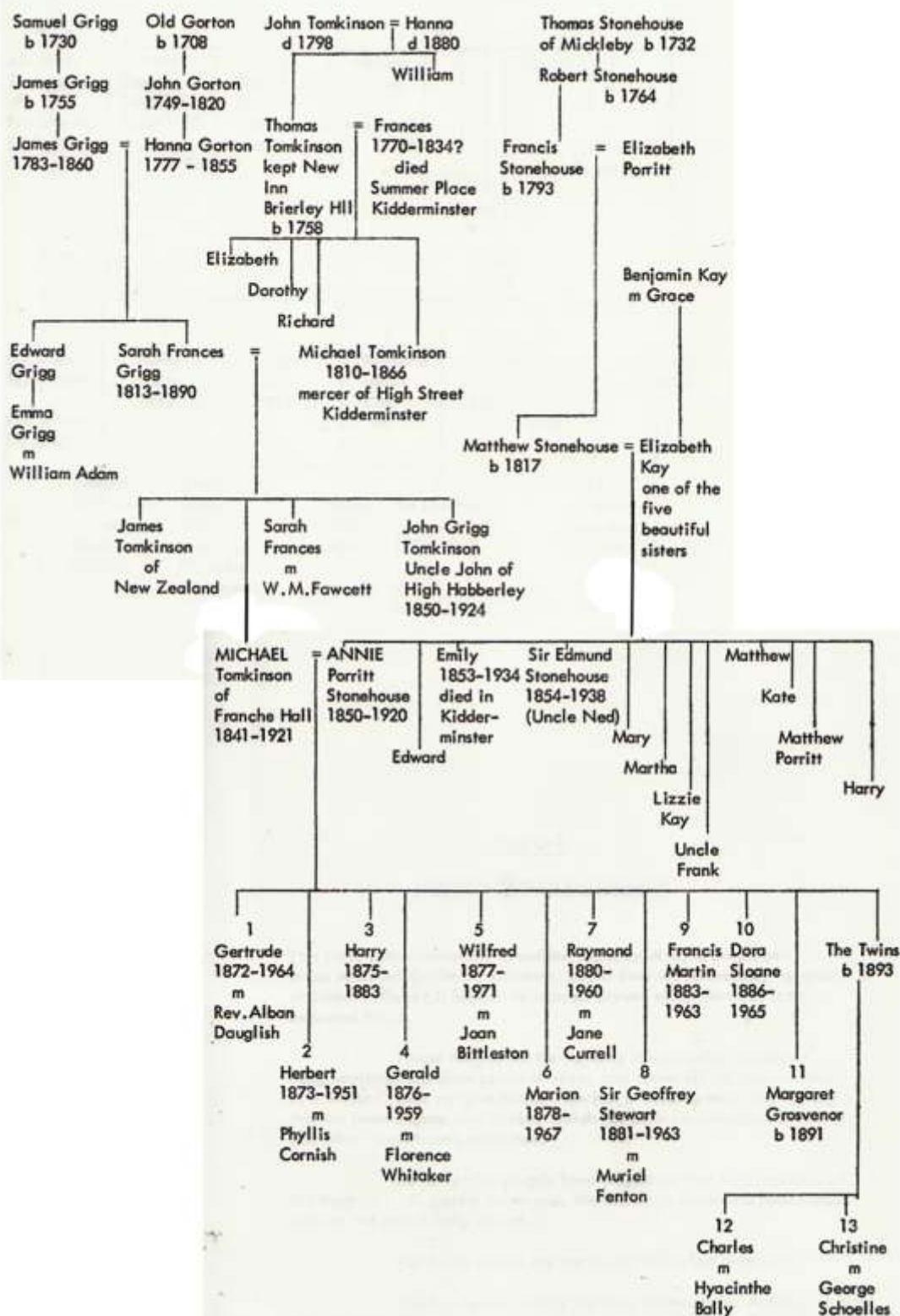


FRANCHE HALL

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# The Tomkinson-Stonehouse Family Tree





### **Introductory Note: The Historical Background**

Many people consider that the period covered by Annie's diary is the most glorious of England's history. Our country was led by some of the greatest names in democracy: Lords Salisbury and Roseberry, Gladstone, Balfour, Campbell-Bannerman, Asquith and Lloyd George.

They saw the partition of Africa, the rise and fall of Bismarck's power politics, the decline of the Liberals and the growth of the Labour Party.

Income tax was commonly between fivepence and eightpence in the pound. Estate duty was just introduced, while Consols often yielded only about 2 per cent.

62 county councils were created by the Local Government Act of 1888; elementary school fees were abolished in 1891, and the same year saw a new Factories Act with a minimum age for children to work in factories of 11, and a daily maximum hours for women to work of 12.

The dockers were as ready for a strike then as they are now. They struck in 1889, for a base wage of 6d per hour, and they got it.

Victoria, that great Queen, had her first jubilee in 1887, and the people of England believed that in those fifty years they had seen more progress, not only in a materialistic sense, but also in the spheres of morality freedom, justice and humanity than in any previous period in the history of the world. Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee in 1897 proved that the enthusiasm of her people for their sovereign was as great as ever.

Her son, King Edward VII, was one of the most likeable of English sovereigns, and also one of our finest showmen. He may not have been very literate, but he had one of a monarch's most important attributes, he understood the common people.

When King George V ascended the throne in 1910, after serving in the Royal Navy for 15 years, he was already 45 years old. The population of England and Wales in 1871 was 22.7 million, and on average every married woman between the ages of 20 and 40 bore a child every 3 years!



## **Chapter 1**

### **Acknowledgements and apologies**

This little note endeavours to outline the story of my grandparents.

It has been written for my children, and if they are interested, my grandchildren. Should it happen to interest anyone else, then this is an unexpected bonus.

Please forgive me for its many inaccuracies, omissions, exaggerations, mistaken points of view, and above all my shortcomings as a writer. Like my grandfather I am just a working man, and writing this has been a spare time hobby, which has been fun when work, health and other commitments permitted.

So many kind people have helped me that it is impossible to list them all. A special thank you, therefore, to those who have helped and are not specifically named.

Particular thanks are due to the following people:-

Firstly, my own family for their forbearance, Audrey, Jessica, Robert, Deborah and Annie Louise, who is named after her great grandmother.

The patient and knowledgeable staff of the Kidderminster Public Library. Miss Margaret Grosvenor Tomkinson, Miss M.R. Tomkinson, Mr. John Tomkinson, Mr. Roger Tomkinson, Mr. Nigel Tomkinson.

The Kidderminster Shuttle for permission to use much information from back numbers.

Mr. Oliver Stonehouse, Mr. E. H. O. Carpenter, Sir Tatton Brinton, Miss Muriel Owen, Mr. Fred Hay, Mr. W. Greaves, Mr. George Hall, Mrs. Head, Mr. Eliot Evers, Mr. Talbot Griffiths.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Events in Kidderminster and district**

#### **With acknowledgements to Mr. G. E. Hall**

- 1870** First issue of Kidderminster Shuttle. Foundation stone laid of St. Barnabas Church Franche and of Kidderminster Infirmary. Opening of Kidderminster Cricket Club's ground at Chester Road. Stourport Bridge opened.
- 1871** First Election of Kidderminster School Board. Telegraphic Communication opened in Kidderminster and district. New wholesale market opened.
- 1872** Waterworks opened, and first town sewage scheme completed.
- 1873** Completion of Coventry Street School.
- 1874** Strike of Brussels Carpet Weavers.
- 1875** Town demonstration for Women's Suffrage. Election of burial board. Baxter Statue unveiled.
- 1876** Stourport Wesleyan Schools opened.
- 1877** New Municipal buildings opened.
- 1878** First Meeting of the Chamber of Commerce. New Cemetery opened. Great fire at Brintons. Royal Axminster introduced by Tomkinsons & Adam.
- 1879** The new School of Art opened, also the floating swimming pool at Stourport. All Saints Church Wribbenhall consecrated.
- 1880** All Saints Church Wilder consecrated. John Brinton elected M.P. for the borough. Spennells Mill destroyed by fire. Kidderminster Savings Bank closed.
- 1881** Sir Rowland Hill statue unveiled. The lending department of the free library opened. The Medical Aid Association inaugurated. The Baptist Sunday Schools on Arch Hill opened. The first Board of Conciliation in connection with the Carpet Industry met. St. James' Workman' Club opened. Skating rink on Station Hill opened.
- 1883** Lea Street Schools, Baptist Church and Isolation Hospital on Stourport Road opened. Kidderminster placed in telephonic communication with London. Part of Hoobrook wooden viaduct collapsed. W. G. Grace played cricket at Chester Road.
- 1884** Mill Lane School opened. About 108 cases of smallpox in the borough, and about 1500 cases of typhoid. Strike at Dixon carpet factory. Floating swimming bath at Bewdley opened.

- 1885** St. John's Girls School, Brook Street, opened. The General Post Office in Exchange Street, Baxter Church, the new brick Hoobrook Viaduct, and a Telephone Exchange opened.
- 1886** Severe floods in the town. The Liberal Club in Park Butts, the New Reservoir in Sutton Park Road, and the Childress Hospital opened. Pike Mills fire.
- 1887** Branch Post Offices, the first Brinton Park, new Pike Mills and St. George's Parish Hall opened.
- 1888** The School of Science and the High School for girls opened. The original Holy Innocent's Church dedicated and the Retail Market extended.
- 1889** First County Council elections. St. George's Working Men's Institute on Lion Hill opened. Wolverley Church re-opened after extensive restoration.
- 1890** The town placed on telephone trunk line to Birmingham. The Severn was frozen. St. Andrew's Church, South Street, dedicated. First English cup tie in Kidderminster, Harriers beat Bath 4 - 1. Milton Hall Baptist Church opened.
- 1891** Bewdley floating swimming pool carried away by floods. Beginning of Free Education. The Kidderminster Harriers football club started after the failure of an earlier club. Wooden theatre opened at the foot of Comberton Hill.
- 1892** New half time board school in Coventry Street opened. Mr. Clement Dailey started a profit sharing scheme for his work people. Foundation stone of New Library laid.
- 1893** Borough infectious hospital destroyed by fire. Mr. T. Grove became first working man magistrate. Stourport bridge freed from tolls. School board elected for "the foreign".
- 1894** The Public Library opened, and Parish Councils came into existence. First part of the rebuilt St. John's Church was dedicated.
- 1895** Severn frozen. After extensive restoration St. Mary's Church re-opened. Foley Park School opened.
- 1896** New Countess of Huntingdon's Chapel in Park Street dedicated. Fire at New Road timber mills. Moving pictures shown at Theatre Royal, Comberton Hill. An earth tremor shook the town.
- 1897** Two companies formed for manufacturing cycles. Castle Road opened. Work started on construction of the tramway. Telephone exchange opened at Stourport. First cycling sports held in the town.
- 1898** The Electric Tramway service commenced. A new well for increased water supply sunk in Green Street. 5th Barnum and Baileys circus visited the town.
- 1899** New Volunteer rifle range made by Devil's Spadeful. Kidderminster Choral Society, and Old Boys Association of King Charles and Hartlebury Schools inaugurated. Kidderminster Cricket Club champions of the Birmingham and District Cricket League.

- 1900** Floods in the town. Chinese Trade delegation visited Kidderminster. The Town Hall lit by electricity. St. George's Infants School Leswell Lane, and the old Stourport Road reservoir as a swimming bath, opened.
- 1901** Sgt. T. Lawrence awarded the V. C. St. George's Hall Bewdley opened, and Spire of St. Ambrose Catholic Church dedicated.
- 1902** Stourport Post Office opened. George Street Methodist Church and Bewdley Waterworks opened.
- 1903** An Education Committee elected. Wooden Theatre on Comberton Hill dismantled. The William Adam Ward added to Mill Street Hospital. The Opera House on Comberton Hill opened. Murder of Mary Swinbourne on Aggborough Farm.
- 1904** Winston Churchill spoke in the Town Hall. Second part of rebuilt St. John's Church dedicated. John Brinton made first freeman of the borough. Earth tremor in the town. Enville Hall destroyed by fire.
- 1905** Motor train service from Bewdley to Hartlebury inaugurated. Construction of new water works in Green Street started. Public meeting about the building of a beet sugar factory. Birmingham Road Methodist Church opened.
- 1906** The Ice Factory opened in Dixon Street. Seven acre extension to Brinton Park opened.
- 1907** Severe fire at Brinton. New Meeting Hall opened. Noah's Ark in Worcester Street burnt. Mrs. Woodward of Bewdley became first local lady to sit on a Borough Council.
- 1908** St. Oswald's Mission Church dedicated. Franche Village Club opened. Herefordshire and Worcestershire Agricultural show held at the Elms, Blakebrook, Kidderminster.
- 1909** Mill Street Skating Rink, the Conservative Club on Park Butts, and the Swedenborgian Church on Comberton Hill, opened.
- 1910** The X-Ray room at the Infirmary, the Grand Cinema in Mill Street, the new schools at Elderslie, and an employment exchange in Mill Street were opened. The new St. Michael's Church at Stourport was dedicated.
- 1911** The Opera House was opened as a cinema. Gen. Baden-Powell visited the town. A domestic training centre was established at Caldwell Hall.
- 1912** The newly formed Nursing Association inaugurated. Bewdley Grammar School closed. The New Girls High School in Chester Road and the Futurist Cinema were opened. Borough boundaries extended by the inclusion of Foley Park, Somerleyton, Franche, and part of Wolverley.
- 1913** The Nurses Home in Hall Street opened. Two bus services were started and ran simultaneously for some time. Gustav Hamel the aviator landed on the Cricket Ground.
- 1914** John Brinton died. Floods in Kidderminster. Copes Memorial Clock in the Horsefair unveiled.
- 1915** The Larches offered as a Red Cross hospital. Copt E. Jotham awarded the V.C.

**1916** James Morton, Town Clerk for 44 years, died aged 81. 2/Lt. E. F. Baxter awarded V.C. Ald. G.W. Grosvenor and Michael Tomkinson made Freemen of the Borough.

**1917** River Severn frozen. Old St. Michael's Church Stourport demolished.

**1918** Tank Week held in the town. National Kitchen opened in Horsefair. Pte. J. F. Young awarded the V.C.

**1919** Peace celebrations held in the town. A tank was presented to the borough by the War Savings movement.

**1920** The Shuttle celebrated its 50th anniversary. Greenhill hostel was opened. The foundation stone of the first municipal house in the borough was laid. Kidderminster Cricket Club purchased their Chester Road ground.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Annie and her family up to 1871**

This is based on the diaries of Annie Porritt Stonehouse; Annie's great great grandfather, Thomas Stonehouse of Mickleby, Yorkshire, was born in 1732. His son Robert Stonehouse, born in 1764, had a son Francis Stonehouse, Annie's grandfather, who is the first to be more than just a name.

Francis Stonehouse was an excise officer in the government mice, his job seems to have been twofold; he collected the excise dues on the legal imports, and he acted as coastguard and watched a section of the coast for smugglers. It was a wild stretch of country that he guarded, between the North Yorkshire Moors and the North Sea, a land where only the tough and self reliant survived when the snow blizzards blew in from Germany. North East of Mickleby where Francis Stonehouse lived, a stream flows into Runswick Bay, and it is known by the name of Calais Beck; a name derived from its association with the smugglers, who were supposed to have sailed from Calais to land their contraband brandy there. Due to the extensive loss of revenue that the authorities sustained through the activities of these outlaws, there was a very substantial price on their head. Francis Stonehouse knew this stretch of coast and the paths that led to it, like the back of his hand.

One night a man ran up to the Excise Officers' house shouting that a party of smugglers had landed at the Calais Beck, and offered to provide a party of his friends to join with the Excise Officer in an attempt to catch the villains. Francis had been waiting for just such an opportunity and wanted the reward for himself, so he sent the fellow packing and laid his own ambush; of course, it is said that he got the smugglers, and the brandy, and the reward in his pocket.

Amongst the friends of Francis Stonehouse, was a Yorkshire couple, Benjamin and Grace Kay; Francis Stonehouse; son, Matthew Porritt Stonehouse, met fell in love with and in a whirlwind courtship married the Kay's daughter, Elizabeth, at St. Silas's Church in Liverpool in 1847, and our Annie Porritt Stonehouse, their firstborn, was born on April 13th, 1850. Annie's mother, Elizabeth Kay, born in Bradford, was one of five sisters, all famous for their attractiveness and beauty.

The sisters paid a celebrated visit to Dublin to visit their Irish relations, there their good looks and charm quickly earned them invitations to all the most exciting parties.

The Kay sisters, with their good looks and their amusing conversation, naturally all married young and well. Four of them, including Elizabeth, married Sea Captains, Stonehouse, Dunhill, Bradford and Lawson. The youngest sister, perhaps having seen that however attractive sailors may be, being <sup>a</sup> sailor's wife has its disadvantages, married a physician, a doctor Walker, and it was with this son-in-law that old Mrs. Grace Kay seems to have spent her widowhood. The Kays were a closely knit family and Annie's mother, Elizabeth Stonehouse, often stayed with her sisters' families, in Wakefield, Horbury, or Bradford.

Matthew Porritt Stonehouse, the son of Francis Stonehouse the Excise Officer, and the father of Annie was a really colourful character. He was born in 1817 and grew into a giant of a man with a great black beard, who chose sailing for his livelihood. He must have gone to sea at an early age as his certificate of service shows his employment as apprentice master and mate in the foreign trade for 22 years. The actual owner of the ship which Matthew captained for so many years, was his kindly and long suffering godfather and uncle by marriage, George Porritt. George Porritt's ship was a well built ocean going two masted Brig, having sails on both masts, about 120 feet in length and of 250 tons capacity.

She got about a bit, and between 1846 and 1852 she visited Montreal, Liverpool, Madras, Cape Town, Trieste, Constantinople (3 voyages of six months each) (where Matthew is said to have somehow managed to get into the Sultan's Harem;) Odessa, Cork, Falmouth, London, Pondicherry and Hull. He manned her with a crew which consisted of the Master, Chief Officer, Second Officer, Carpenter, Steward/Cook, and six seamen.

On some voyages he took his wife with him, on others he had to be content with writing loving letters to her, which got warmer as he came nearer home.

They seem to have been a happy couple; from Constantinople in 1848 he writes "*my darling wife*", getting closer to home from Falmouth 8 weeks later, "*I only want my fat little wife in bed with me to make me the happiest of mortals*".



Annie, the eldest of the family was followed by eleven brothers and sisters, of whom with the normal infant mortality of the age, 4 died young; but Annie's younger brother Matthew who was born in 1866 and died 1883 had a sad story. He seems to have been a happy lad, and one evening after enjoying a theatre party in Leeds with his friends, he stayed on for a carouse with them, and when this was finally over found that he had missed the last train home to Wakefield. It was a pouring wet cold winter's night and he either had to walk the nine miles back home, or face his father's wrath for spending the night out without permission. He chose the wet walk, and arrived home very exhausted and soaked with rain and sweat; then not wishing to incur the family's anger by waking them in the small hours, he threw himself down in the stables in his wet clothes to sleep off his hangover. Of course, he caught pneumonia, and in spite of the most skilled medical attention and his mother's devoted nursing, this promising and interesting young man was dead within a few days; a sad end to a youthful escapade.

The six other children of Matthew and Elizabeth Stonehouse retained throughout their lives a very happy and close relationship with Annie, Pattie, Sir Edmund Stonehouse (Uncle Ned), and Emily were very regular and welcome visitors to Annie's married home, and she in return frequently enjoyed the acceptance of reciprocal Yorkshire hospitality.

Returning to Captain Matthew Stonehouse and the Brig Ann (after which Annie was probably named), at the age of 9 months she accompanied her mother and father on their next voyage; departing from London on December 26th, 1850 they sailed via Table Bay, Saldanha Bay and Cork, returning to Hull on July 22nd, 1851, and Annie always used to say that she learned walk on the Brig's deck at sea. Perhaps as a result of Elizabeth accompanying her husband young Edward Stonehouse was born after their return home.

Now that Elizabeth had two children it was decided that when her husband set off on his next voyage she should stay at home in Wakefield with the babies.

Matthew made another trip to Table Bay, and was met by bad news on his return to Liverpool on April 21st, 1852. Elizabeth Storehouse's sister and her husband Captain Lawson, when on one of their regular trading voyages in the China seas, had had to ship a partly Chinese crew; and from such of the story as has come out it seems that while on a night passage the Lawsons were taken by surprise in their bunks and brutally murdered by bandits who had enlisted as sailors. The villains seem to have got away with it, sold the Lawson's boat at Shanghai and disappeared with the proceeds.

Matthew Stonehouse had always been a stern disciplinarian, and the murder of the Lawsons strengthened him in his beliefs. He only once had serious trouble with his crew; and he asked for a spokesman from the agitators; as soon as the wretched spokesman presented himself before Matthew, Matthew hit him on the chin and laid him flat out on the deck. Matthew then demanded a second spokesman, and when none was forthcoming the men were told to get back to work, which they did without further trouble. For lesser offences such as using abusive language to the master, refusing to sweep the deck, or staying late on shore, Matthew had a system of fines, the man would be stopped two or more days' pay, at, for crewmen, the rate of one shilling a day.

It was not too surprising that when Matthew returned from this voyage, due perhaps to sickness and desertion, he was extremely shorthanded. As the Ann approached the Port of Liverpool an open boat of Longshoremen spied her difficulty and thinking that under the guise of offering help, it might be possible to claim salvage, they came alongside. Matthew immediately saw through the tactic and he picked up the Ann's great ship's grindstone off the deck, with his immense strength he was able to hold it over the side of his Brig above the longshoreman's boat, threatening to drop it through their bottom and sink them, unless they sheared off, which they quickly and wisely

Like most sea Captains plying for trade Matthew had to take it where he could find it, and he took any cargo that would help his ship to pay its way.

On a return run from Madras he got the chance of a passenger, a Mr. Sutton, who was prepared to pay six pounds for the fare home. Matthew found him rather a fussy customer, and determined to teach him a lesson. For the next day's dinner the Ann's steward brought in a baked jam roll for pudding, and Matthew asked his passenger, "*Would he prefer ends or middle*"?

Unwisely, Mr. Sutton chose middles; at which Matthew with great amusement announced that "*me and my mate likes ends*", and Mr. Sutton went hungry. cutting the pudding in two, Matthew gave one half to the mate and kept the other for himself.

Matthew was certainly no coward. To trade on the Turkish coast a "Firman" or permissory document was necessary, and this had to be surrendered at Constantinople before the ship named on it was allowed to depart. With the slothfulness which characterised the later days of the Turkish Empire the office to which it had to be surrendered was only open for a short time in the mornings. It so happened that Matthew had concluded his business and was ready to sail just after the office had closed. The tide was right and there was a spanking wind whistling to take him home to his fat little wife, so off he sailed. Although the little Ann was heavily fired on by the Turkish forts on both sides of the Dardanelles she got through unscathed and was on her way home a day early.

Matthew's last voyage as Captain of the Brig Ann was another Table Bay round trip. In those dangerous days when seamen had such very limited navigational aids, and it was normal for Lloyds of London to have 3,000 ships reported lost to them every year, the chances were that something would go wrong sooner or later. About the end of 1852 when Matthew was very close to home, in a foggy winter's night, the little Brig Ann ran aground on the treacherous Goodwin Sands, and was a total loss. The crew were all landed at Deal, paid off and discharged on January 3rd, 1853, and no lives were lost.

On rejoining his wife, Matthew learnt that his second child and only son, Edward, had died on October 3rd, 1852, and that Elizabeth was again with child; Annie's younger sister, Emily, who was born on February 24<sup>th</sup>, 1853. This combination of unfortunate circumstances, together with advancing age, decided Matthew to give up his sea career. Living in the midst of a textile district it was not surprising that he chose to go into Worsted Wool Spinning. To gain experience he invested in a partnership with a spinner called Foster in 1853. As soon as Matthew thought he had learnt what he needed to know from Foster, Matthew persuaded Foster to buy him out, and started on his own in rented premises in Wakefield on the corner of Westgate and Ings road. The Stonehouse family moved house to 153 Westgate, Wakefield, and their home, now part of the offices of M.P. Stonehouse Limited, is still in the family ownership.

Like many other sea Captains who come into industry, Matthew didn't find business as easy as he thought he would, and he was in and out of financial trouble for many years.

Fortunately for the family, Matthew's son, Edmund, was a shrewd and sound man of affairs, but it is understandable that he did not find his father an easy man with whom to work. Edmund was highly regarded in the trade, and was offered the plum job of manager of Fleming Reid's in Scotland, but although they several times nearly parted father and son managed to bury their differences and stick together.

Occasionally, Matthew still managed to show he knew best. The firm was having some machinery installed, and had hired a crane and a craneman to put it into position. Matthew didn't think much of the splice in the craneman's rope and feared lest it should give way and wreck some of the precious machinery. When he told the craneman what he thought of his splice, the man challenged the mill owner to do better and, of course, it wasn't difficult for a very experienced seaman like Matthew to show off a really top class splice.

Another matter ended up by Matthew having to appear before the Wakefield Magistrates. The posted permitted Mill working hours for females were 6.a.m. to 6. p.m. One winter's evening acting on information received the factory inspector visited Matthew's mill to investigate the complaint that his employees had been working outside the permitted hours. In the middle of the investigation someone turned off the gas lights, leaving the factory inspector in the darkness. It is amusing to think of the old rogue Matthew laughing to himself as he turned the tap off on the factory inspector. In fact, in the report of the magistrates hearing of January 12th, 1872, the charge of obstructing the factory inspector was dismissed. Matthew had not even been on the premises at the time, and the gas had been turned out by the mill engineer in his usual routine after he had stopped the engine. He said he did not know that the inspector was inside and had put him in the dark "inadvertently". However, Matthew was fined one pound each for the six women employees who had still been working at 6.15 p.m.

Whatever may have been Matthews's qualities as a spinner, he quickly made a popular impact on his adopted town. He was a founder member of the Wakefield Chamber of Commerce in 1864, a member of the executive committee of the Industrial and Fine Arts Exhibition in 1865, and a vocal member of the city council for a considerable period.

About 1866, with more children to house and greater prosperity, Matthew and Elizabeth moved to a more spacious residence in Wakefield at 27 St John's North. It was perhaps this more elegant background which helped to show Annie off to the best possible advantage when Michael Tomkinson came up to visit them.

A girl's whole approach to life is often influenced by her relationship with her father. In the Stonehouse family Annie was in a very special position, even if she was too young to remember, she was the only child who had been to sea in the brig with her father, and she probably built up quite a romantic image of him.

That day when he left Istanbul and the Golden gates behind the little square rigged Ann. Doubtless when they came to run the gauntlet of the Turkish shore batteries he would be dressed in a thick sweater, an old faded gold peaked cap, and dark blue trousers. His sturdy figure would make the brig's wheel look tiny, and his great black beard would give drama to his whole appearance.

He would have the brig's hold, as had his forefathers over the centuries, packed tight with the exotic riches of the East, to titivate the appetites of the Victorian middle classes. He would have called out his antlers to his crew, to cram on all sail that prudence would allow, and probably a good deal more too. Heavily loaded and hard driven the Ann would often be almost totally obscured by the clouds of spray as she cut her way through the short sharp seas of the Hellespont, making the aim of the Turkish gunners doubly difficult.

One can imagine Matthew waving his arms and hurling derisive imprecations at the gunners as their missiles threw up great fountains of water round his little ship, until finally when out of their range he would hard over the wheel to his mate, and have a good laugh at the sheer joy of being alive under the blue Turkish skies.

The wise thoughtful and far sighted approach, that characterised Amie's philosophy all her life, was perhaps a direct reaction to her father's delightfully dashing and devil may care ways.

To go back now to Annie's other background, the more mundane world of the textile business. The worsted yarns, in the production of which the Stonehouses were now engaged, is characterised by its careful combing designed to produce a high degree of parallelisation of the fibres, resulting in a woollen yarn of exceptional strength and wear resistance.

The Stonehouse spinning mill buildings are solidly built in the characteristic careful Yorkshire way. It is a district historically mainly concerned with wool textiles, and the local children seem to inherit the know-how of from their parents. The people have made themselves a reputation being hard working and self reliant, staunch friends and good story tellers. The Stonehouses themselves seem to have varied widely, all intelligent and interesting people, but inside this, some were steady, working and reliable, others were charming, amusing, gay and indolent. Annie was undoubtedly one of the steady ones, and seems to have taken her responsibilities as the eldest child of the family very seriously.

She was born on April 13th, 1850. In a time, when outside the main cultural centres very few women received a proper education, Annie was extremely well educated. She was one of the first women to sit for an external public examination, and at the age of 16 she passed the Cambridge senior local examination with distinction. In 1867, at the age 17, sitting at York, she passed the Cambridge senior examinations with third class honours. She passed five subjects: Religious knowledge, English, German, Music and French, in the last of which she was distinguished.

Annie's home environment must have been an excellent initiation for her later life. Her father's gargantuan personality, with strong love of action, gradually, imperceptibly coming under the light of his clever elegant fat little wife. Now that he was at home and she could influence him daily, she gradually made his way of life more cautious and predictable, while never at any time trying to subdue gorgeous sense of humour and joy in living life to the full. It is a common pattern of marriage for the husband to start off with a roar, while gradually the wife ageing less, and seeing ahead more, becomes the strong hand guiding the marriage in the softest, subtlest, and most elegant of velvet gloves.

Probably in 1868 the young Mr. Michael Tomkinson had set up on his own as an agent. Much of the yarn used in Kidderminster's carpet manufacturing industry was spun in Yorkshire, and the Yorkshire spinners retained agents in Kidderminster on commission, to obtain business from customers, the Kidderminster carpet manufacturers.

While a young man starting up would stand little chance of getting the agency of one of the larger well represented spinners, he would search out all the firms who had no Kidderminster agent. Michael doubtless set out for Yorkshire with of likely spinners, a trade directory, and as many letters of introduction as he had been able to obtain. One of the firms on his list was M.P. Stonehouse.

Although there was a perfectly good Inn in Wakefield, and Storehouses and Tomkinsons boasted a hotel manager amongst their ancestry, it was not Michael's plan to stay at it. It was often more convenient, more likely of success, and cheaper if a special project such as obtaining the firm's agency could be discussed away from the distraction of the Mill, and in the comfort of the Mill owner's home. With the plentiful servant situation of the time, an extra guest was little trouble to the lady the house, and if she had daughters, and he was a personable young man, would be very welcome.

Now that he was 27, it is quite likely that Michael was beginning to feel that it was about time for him to begin to look round for a wife. Anyway, after Michael Tomkinson had called at the Stonehouse spinning mill and presented his credentials, to Matthew, he was invited to supper, and to stay the night at their fine new house of 27 St. John's North.

It must have been a bit of an ordeal for Michael to be surveyed and sized up by all the Stonehouse family, and particularly by Elizabeth, but this was part of the object of bringing him home. With his usual charm of manner Michael seems to have passed the test, and thereafter become a welcome visitor to the Stonehouse household. On the business side in 1869 and 1871, in as yet a small way, he established himself as a man on the way to success, and also as an acceptable suitor to the beautiful Annie Stonehouse. Michael obtained Matthew's permission and proposed to Annie early in 1871. A factor that may have helped his suit was his devotion to the work of the established church, which was one of Annie's lifelong interests. Perhaps inspired by the desire to prove this devotion to Annie, in that year of 1871 Michael had played a prominent part on the committee concerned with the building of a new church in the village where he lived. It is possible that Annie and her parents attended the consecration as Michael's guests.

Annie Stonehouse and Michael Tomkinson were married on September 17th, 1871, Annie was 21 years old and Michael was 30. They were well suited, and quite alike in many ways, with Annie probably the deeper thinker of the two.



It seems to have been a love match, perhaps in Michael she saw a man, who while quite different from her father had the same strong powers of action and decisiveness.

Michael must have been quite a difficult man to live with; she would have to keep pace with his tremendous energy, and the continuous stream of new schemes, plans and ideas with which his mind constantly overflowed.

The inescapable fertility of normal femininity would make great demands, physical intellectual and managerial in the birth, upbringing, education and management of their young and the household in which they would grow up. If their dreams for the future of Michael's business bore fruit, the scale of her administrative responsibilities would steadily increase; fortunately her superb organisational talents enabled her to make a great success of handling the growth in executive and personnel problems, which were part of the life work of a lady of her place and time.

Like many people who have known hard times in their youth, when money had been short, Annie and Michael always adhered to the simple, almost austere way of life in which they had been brought up.

## Chapter 4

### Michael, his family and his work up to 1871

Nobody has ever wasted much time on trying to trace any fictitious Tomkinson connections with remote ancestors who shared the beds of merry monarchs to beget enobled brats, but a little is known of our origins.

Jovial old Thomas Tomkinson, born in 1758, was a much and popular citizen of Brierley Hill in the block country, and he was manager and the proprietor of the New Inn. In his family portrait he looks just the part of the convivial host, - who would enjoy sharing a tankard ale with his customers. His wife, however, looks a harder character, and a close critical careful face. She probably kept the money and the books might, straight, and made sure the barmaids didn't swell.

Probably Thomas and Frances did so well out of the New Inn that they sold out and purchased an Ironmongery business in Leamington Spa, which their son may later have inherited from them. For an older man the long hours then expected of an Innkeeper would be a good riddance. Leamington Spa was a far more congenial place to live than Brierley Hill, but the Ironmongering doesn't seem to have been nearly as profitable as the Inn keeping. The family home in Leamington was often visited by their children and further descendants.

Thomas and Frances' son, Annie Stonehouses's father-in-law, a previous Michael Tomkinson, who describes himself on his marriage certificate, as resident in the High Street in Kidderminster, probably about where Marks and Spencer now is, with the rank of gentleman and the profession of mercer or draper. What he doesn't mention is that he was also a successful undertaker.

One can imagine Michael in his tall black hat, and his black cloak, leading the funeral cortege on a black horse. Like most undertakers, who in the gloom of their profession, wish to preserve their sanity, he seems to have had a jolly sense of humour; and as he rode along, doubtless wearing a suitably solemn expression, he perhaps was chuckling himself over some new anecdote he had just made up; which would be kept until he met up with his friends in the evening.

Undertakers are often in a good position to get cognisance of the chief beneficiaries under a will and should they perhaps be moving into the larger home of the deceased, to help them to invest part of their inheritance in new furnishings, purchased from their trusted friend Michael Tomkinson, and thus the two businesses were partly complementary.

While he seems to have been well liked and highly regarded, as a business man he was adequate rather than successful. For many years like so many of the tradesmen of his time, in order to keep a close eye on his assets he lived over his shop. He was a councillor, under the old regime, also held several minor official positions. The bride he chose was a Miss Grigg, and her father, a gentleman resident of the more fashionable area of Blakebrook in Kidderminster. The Griggs were a well known middle class family, whose substance derived from a confectionary business, and one of spinster descendants started and ran a successful dame school at which some of the Tomkinsons were educated.

The second Michael Tomkinson who became the husband of Anne Stonehouse was born in Kidderminster on May 29th, 1841. At first he to Townsend House School, Proud Cross, Kidderminster, where the headmaster, Dr. Askin, taught him the most beautiful copperplate handwriting. In legibility, the precision of its formation, and its well proportioned layout on the pages of his letters are a delight, and he retained this scriptural elegance surprising degree to the end of his life. At Townsend House in his final year he was a prizewinner. While he spent a short time at school in Bridgnorth, his main education was at the King Charles 1 grammar School in Kidderminster, under the redoubtable Dr. Sheppard.

Later his father sent him away to serve a proper apprenticeship in the family craft. One of the leading houses in the business was James Shoolbred of Tottenham Court Road in London, who describe themselves elegantly as dealers in British lace. From them Michael seems to have received a very valuable training in the all important art of salesmanship, while in London to have acquired some of the polish, smartness and culture of the great city. At school he seems to have learnt book-keeping; and then from his close association with his father's business he would have picked up sense and instinct for the essential factors in survival when you are on your own, which is such a hard thing for outsiders to understand.

An interesting account, which was found in an attic in Leamington the house was sold, has survived, of a visit Michael made with a friend, to the Crystal Palace Exhibition in 1862, when he was 21 years old.

He writes: "I left Leamington on the 10.35 a.m. train on Sunday, 6th; my only companion to Oxford was a member of the Alpine Club, and much entertained by his conversation. He had twice made the ascent of Mont Blanc!

On arrival at Oxford I met my friend, John Grainger, as arranged. John soon became enveloped in clouds of smoke and ejaculated, throwing himself full length on the seat: "This cloud all other clouds dispels, and wraps me delight". After a good pull at his sherry flask he went on: "Friend of my his goblet sip, tis not half so sweet as woman's lip, but oh! tis more sincere". While I did not agree with all his pleasantries, they made the journey to Paddington seem short.

We took a cab to Williamson Hotel in Cheapside, and after securing our bed and having had a cup of tea, we strode into St. Paul's to hear the close of service, and then made an inspection of the monuments.

We then walked to Spurgeons tabernacle, but every seat was taken by ticket holders and we had to content ourselves with standing room in the aisle. He made a beautiful sermon, better than at Worcester, exercising a spell on the congregation with his wonderful power of delivery and clear distinct voice.

On Monday morning we were out before eight, took a train from bridge terminus to arrive at Crystal Palace by 10 o'clock. On reaching the nave of the building we were astonished far beyond anticipation by the fairylike structure round us. We traversed successive courts typifying the progress of the arts.

After the picture gallery we made an ascension to one of the towers, and the view we obtained from the top amply repaid the fatigue in ascending, though the steps seemed interminable. The view also from the terrace was very fine, and Blondins rope seemed tremendously high stretched the front of the building.

After a tour of the grounds we began to feel very tired, so refreshing ourselves with Pork Pie and Porter, we caught the 5.50 train for London Bridge, feeling very much pleased with our day. From London Bridge we took a cab to the Haymarket Theatre, and obtained a fair seat to see the farce, Lord Dundreary, in which I was disappointed. However, the general effect of the ballet which followed, the gorgeous dresses and scenery, was good.

On leaving about 12 we arrived at Williamson tired, but determined to rise early next morning for the exhibition.

In the morning we mounted an omnibus for Kensington, fare 6d. From the outside of a bus you see many strange characters, the acrobatic performances of the street arabs, and the omnibus and cob drivers have a pretty wit. The wide brimmed straw hats, the rolled turbans, the residences of the nobility, and the French embassy all interested us.

This time we traversed the ground floor of the exhibition, and the carpets; dining in one of the side saloons on cold ham and salad for until by 7. p.m. we were thoroughly tired out again.

We then went on to Cremorne Gardens. As it grew dark the place was magnificently illuminated by some thousands of gas jets, which had most brilliant and fairy like appearance, immensely superior to any illumination I ever saw elsewhere. About 9.30 the company began to arrive, and we saw gay men and girls who form that large class in London who lead the fast life. After seeing a very grand display of fireworks we took our departure about 11 o'clock, one of the waiters informing us that 'twas then the festivities were just commencing and reached their zenith about half past two. We took cab from Cremorne to St. Paul's to be abed by midnight.

After breakfast we explored several bookshops, I purchased some Montgomery and Dickens. Back again at the Exhibition in the galleries we noted Bennets immense clock, the finger of which you can see distinctly move. Through the picture galleries and sculptures until finally it was to make our way home. "

Such was Michael's London expedition, and the way he chose to spend it tells us quite a bit about the man. Firstly, there wasn't a wasted moment, they lived it to the full; then they packed in a bit of worship, some sightseeing, a lot of culture, and with wise caution just dipped their toes in the exciting hedonism of Cremorne.

Should anyone research the ancestors, curiously enough there is another story from Gertrude about Michael's forebears - that there was another Michael Tomkinson who lived at Quarry Bank, Bridgnorth, and this would fit certain otherwise unexplained facts.

He is said to have been a very attractive man who enjoyed the girls, who married two rich and gay wives, who got through two fortunes, and died in Leamington, his surviving widow then coming to live at Northcliffe House near the Infirmary in Kidderminster; and confusingly there is in the 1861 census a Michael Tomkinson aged 50 resident in Franche with a wife named Sarah; he was commercial traveller in carpets, yet Tomkinson was not a common name in the district.

### **Michael and his world of Carpets.**

Of all Michael's services to the community, his greatest was undoubtedly performed through the Tomkinson & Adam carpet business, which provided high employment and relatively high earnings for their employees, gave the community better value in well designed carpets than had previously been available to them.

Kidderminster had been a textile town long before Michael's time. Situated so close to the Welsh borders, the coarse hard wearing Welsh wools from the hill sheep, so suitable for carpets, have traditionally found their way to the market of Kidderminster. While initially these wools were used for coarse heavy woollen cloths, when a falling off in their sales caused a trade depression in the town, about 1735 one of the Pearsall family introduced the weaving of carpets. By 1751 Pococke in his travels through England mentioned that Kidderminster is famous for carpets, both in the flat scotch and the loop pile Brussels weaves.

Kidderminster has prospered by being a place for the small man who survives by his wits and enterprise, and in 1677 the 417 looms in the town were controlled by 157 master weavers, none of whom had more than 7 looms, and most of them only had two or three. However hard life was in days, such small operational units must have provided the possibility of fulfilling your own personality, doing your own thing, in your own way, within the established structure of society.

About 1750 new continental technical developments in carpet weaving imported by the Earl of Pembroke in Wilton began to threaten Kidderminster's new industry. Rather than go under, a brave Kidderminster entrepreneur, John Broom, travelled to the low countries; and in Brussels and Tournay learnt the new techniques, bringing back an experienced Belgian technician with him. John Broom and his technician started work in a secluded garret in the Mount Skipet, Park Butts district of Kidderminster to build one of the new Brussels looms, and to get it into production.

Such an exciting secret, of course, was impossible to keep in so small a community; and another manufacturer organised some industrial espionage, and managed to copy Broom's loom. Each night he climbed a ladder and watched through a small window noting every detail until he was able to build the Brussels loom himself. Thus by a combination of innovation, enterprise and chicanery the carpet trade in Kidderminster was saved and so expanded that by 1807 there were 1000 of the new looms in Kidderminster.

Amongst the many exciting ideas exhibited in the great exhibition of 1851, was the power driven carpet loom of the Bigelow Carpet Co. in the U.S.A. Bigelow wisely offered to licence their British patent rights and several Kidderminster manufacturers took up their offer.

Brintons, who trace their origins as spinners at nearby Hillpool to before 1783, together with Worths and Jecks Dixons were amongst the foremost.

James Humphries, in his own right a brilliant engineer, took out his own patents and applied his own system of power to the loop pile Brussels carpet weaving loom in his Mill Street Manufactory in 1852. So successful was his innovation that he was able to build a great Brussels power loom carpet factory 126 feet long by 80 feet wide. He was no sluggard at marketing either, and wiped the eye of his competitors by obtaining the prestigious and substantial contract for carpeting the newly built houses of Parliament.

Michael was now beginning to grow up, and if a man's period of greatest potential is between the ages of 20 and 40, the years between 1861 and 1881 were certainly Michael's time of greatest achievement. He was doubtless greatly helped and stimulated by the fact that this was a period of exciting innovation and exhilarating growth in Kidderminster's carpet industry as a whole, as can be seen from the following official employment figures for those connected with carpet and rug manufacture.

	1861		1871		1881	
	No.	%	No.		No.	%
Worcestershire	1,673	22.41	3,590	31.03	6,659	47.62
Yorkshire	3,735	50.03	5,056	43.71	4,621	33.04
Elsewhere	2,057	27.56	2,922	25.26	2,705	19.34
Total	7,465	100.00	11,568	100.00	13,985	100.00



Kidderminster, from having employed less than a quarter of those employed in the industry rose to nearly half, outstripping their competitors in Yorkshire and Scotland, presumably by better management because, it appears that they paid higher wages. In 1885 the Scottish weavers came out on strike, because they claimed wages in Kidderminster were 17% higher than their own! James Sinclair, the Scottish employers involved quoted their average wage per week for a male worker as £1. 17. 5d.

In 1884 when Annie's engagement diary commences, the Carpet Directory of the local paper, the Kidderminster Shuttle, shows 24 firms engaged in Carpet Manufacture in Kidderminster and four in Stourport.

Those in Kidderminster were:

Atkins & Naylor	E. Hughes	Shaw
Bannister	James Humphries	R. Smith
Barton	Jefferies	J. E. Stone
Brintons	Morton & Sons	Tomkinson & Adam
Dixons	T. & A. Naylor	M. Whittall
Fawcetts	Oldland	H. R. Willis
Greaves Fidoe	Palmer	Benjamin Woodward
W. Green	Potter & Lewis	Woodward Grosvenor

In Stourport were:

C. Harrison      T. Bond Worth      R. Smith      T. Garlick

Unfortunately in 1885 Thomas Garlick were reported as having liabilities of £5,000 but assets unlikely to realise half the amount, and in those tough days these sort of problems were common enough, and it wasn't long before Dixons went out of business.

Michael's real career in carpets probably started firstly with Lea & Simcox where he learnt design and then later with a clerkship at Pemberton Talbots carpet factory in Mill Street, Kidderminster, perhaps about 1862 after the completion of his apprenticeship in London. The Talbots, a fine old Kidderminster family with a superb record of public service were also amusing and intelligent people. Pemberton, who had been Mayor in 1861, had a lot of business troubles, but they don't seem to have interfered with his enjoyment of life, there was a limerick about him which began Perbestos the always tight, and his sister had a lover called Woodward.

Once Pemberton got in a railway carriage and to his amazement a man in the carriage opened the other door and leapt out on to the railway line, and he realised it was Mr. Woodward presumably escaping from the fear of being horsewhipped, so Michael's boss was quite a colourful character. The situation between the two is indicated by a letter Pemberton wrote to Michael in 1866:

*"Referring to our conversation of yesterday, there are great reasons why I cannot take anyone as partner. I should not be acting fairly towards them, as I have a debt owing to my father (George Talbot who died in 1868) which a firm would be liable to.*

*There are other reasons which render it impossible just now, but I will make this offer. To increase your salary to £200 for this year of 1866, then commencing on the first of January 1867 will give you one-fourth of the profits, if they should be less than £200 to make it that amount. This you must own is a large increase. Think it over and let me know your decision when arrived at. I hope to be down this afternoon. I had your note.*

*I am, your s truly, Pemberton Talbot".*

The wide black edging of the letter suggests mourning. It is not known what reply Michael gave, but to make an offer of a quarter of the profits without any capital investment indicates the good relationship between the two men. Not long afterwards Pemberton Talbots went out of business, and at the sale of their stock Michael was able to purchase a number of their rugs and resell them at a good profit.

His next venture was to set himself up as an agent selling carpet yarns on commission, an excellent training in running his own finance, accounts and Sales without the need for any capital. It was probably while calling on one of his yarn customers that he met Mr. William Adam whose wide experience included both Templeton and Brintons. Mr. Adam was a carpet engineer of genius, and with Michael's flair for sales, purchasing, and finance, the two were excellently complementary.

In 1869 William Adam and Michael Tomkinson each put up £500 each, and with it they bought some second-hand machinery from H. R. Willis, from Brintons their Chenille rug plant; and arranged to make match rugs for Brintons Wilton and piece goods. Brintons for their part wed to take the output of these rugs, a mutually beneficial arrangement. Tomkinson & Adam exploited their success to make match rugs for other manufacturers.

On a sales visit to New York soon after, Michael called on W. & J. Sloane the great Broadway carpet shop, and he was able to claim that, as he made match rugs for the whole trade, there were no patterns on the floor with which he was not acquainted.

The partnership certainly made quick progress for according to the 1871 census they were already then employing over 190 workpeople; a success partly due to Mr. Adam's perfecting and patenting the application of power to the Chenille carpet loom. Tomkinson and Adam not only benefited from its use themselves, and later ordered 75 power driven Chenille looms at £75 each; and licenced the patent to their competitors, in particular Lyles and Templeton in Scotland, Smiths in England.

At this time the new manufacturing process which was to make Tomkinson & Adam one of the great firms of the trade was being developed in America by Mr. Halcyon Skinner working in partnership with the largest carpet firm in the world, Alexander Smith of Yonkers near New York. Warren Smith, a close friend of Michael and Annie was a head of the firm which held the patents for the loom which came to be known in England as the Royal Axminster Spool Loom. It is believed that Michael was tipped off that British patent rights were available by his friend Mr. John Sloane of W & J. Sloane the Broadway carpet retailers. John Sloane made many friends on his purchasing visits to England, and as a frequent visitor to France he was a valuable source of intelligence about new developments. He over 82 Atlantic crossings, sailing over 250,000 miles on carpet business. To cross the Atlantic in a saloon cost only ten pounds, not that that mattered John Sloane, as he had married a daughter of the late William H. Vanderbilt the American millionaire.

As soon as Michael heard that the British patent rights of the spool loom were for sale he set off immediately for America, and to Alexander Smiths. After he had seen and considered the loom he wrote:

*“ There before me was the manufacturers dream, realised by a machine producing carpets with any number of colours and all the wool on the surface. In a few days I returned to England and I carried in my handbag the patent rights for Great Britain which to a great extent revolutionised the trade. With help of my partner, Mr. William Adam, with his great knowledge of weaving and his ability as an inventor, we soon had the first loom running, and the first piece of Royal Axminster carpet was woven in September 1878”.*

Tomkinson & Adam were not only able to serve the community by giving them better carpet value than ever before, but also to spread the benefits by licensing other firms to use the patents. The original patentees included Southwells of Bridgnorth, Wards of Halifax, Dixons, Woodward Grosvenors and Morton & Sons in Kidderminster, and later other arrangements were made.

By this time Tomkinson & Adam employed a staff of 800 and produced 4,000 rugs a week; by 1888, they were, after Brintons, the most highly rated carpet factory in Kidderminster. Their design studio, on which as much of their success rested, had a staff of 24 designers. The firm bought yarn from outside spinners, scoured it, dyed, set up the pattern preparatory processes, wove the carpet, mended defects, finished, marketed, packed and despatched the goods. In the Chenille weave they offered all widths from church seating to 28 feet, and any length. A speciality was railway rugs for first class carriages. They wove 15 tons of jute a week into their Carpet backs, and the girls on rug weaving earned several shillings a week more than an agricultural worker. As yet their activities were somewhat scattered round Kidderminster, partly in the Sling, up Arch Hill, and Milk Street Mount Pleasant where they finally concentrated their factory on top of a hill, thus avoiding the floods which often enveloped the centre of Kidderminster.

Tomkinson & Adam's notepaper shows warehouses not only at 96 Newgate Street London, and 37 Piccadilly Manchester, but also at 83 Heerengracht Amsterdam, 66 Neuerwall Hamburg, 381 Little Collins Street Melbourne, and 16 St. John's Street Montreal, while the head office remained in Church Street for another 75 years.

To give an idea of the size of the revolution that Michael's introduction of the Royal Axminster patents to England caused; before the new process it is said that three people were required to produce about 1½ yards of Axminster carpet in a working day; the new Spool power loom produced 20 to 25 lineal yards of 27 inch wide carpet in the same time, and later far more.

### **Michael the Man.**

A tremendous ideas man, constantly planning ahead, working out schemes and concepts of which he would reject 9 out of 10, but the tenth would sometimes be a winner.

He had a very quick mind, and while no mathematician, he had a gift for mental arithmetic, so useful in negotiation, enabling numerical evaluation of the potentials of different lines of agreement, while discussions were in progress.

He had a finely tuned sensitivity for other people's feelings, and coming from a family who lived by selling, he knew how to explain with great charm of manner, clarity and eloquence, why his plan had unique advantages, and sense the exact moment to press home his viewpoint and obtain its acceptance.

This flair for people which became more pronounced as he got over the militance of youth, enabled him not only to choose successful business associates, to get on well with his customers, but also to understand and be accepted by those of widely differing beliefs and backgrounds. In his later years he was much sought after as a committee chairman, because of his ability to concentrate a committee on getting through the business without wasting time.

He had seen too many businesses fail to neglect prudence, caution and farsightedness, but once he had evaluated and mastered all the facts of a situation, he was good at snatching an opportunity, making a firm decision, and carrying it through to a successful conclusion. He enjoyed wheeling and dealing, and it was this facility which enabled him to accumulate his initial capital.

Money to Michael, as to any other good business man in itself, meant nothing. He never knew how much he had, the size of his personal income or expenditure and he wasn't very interested. Money in business is the system of measurement, the unit for planning purposes, as acres to farmers, Gross National Product to economists, birth and deaths per 1,000 to population planners. In business to survive the firm has to accumulate so many units per 100 units of the capital the community has entrusted to it so that it is in a position to finance the continuing changes necessary to comply with the demands of society. It was in this clear analytical sort of way that Michael saw money; personal ostentation was an anathema to him and his family.

Although he was a careful man, there are many stories which reveal a streak of kindly generosity to those who had fallen on hard times.

He had a passion for having things done right in every detail. Physically he was a smaller than average man, and like most men who generate tremendous nervous energy, long periods of pressure would leave him very exhausted.

While on the whole he enjoyed reasonably good physical health, Annie quite often records that Michael was poorly, and his friend, Mr. Templeton, in several letters sympathises with him over the recurrent bad headaches to which he is subject. People found him an interesting man and ill health and lack of strength hardly ever seem to have prevented him doing anything that was really important to him either in work or play.

His considerable intellectual capacity is indicated by the breadth of his achievements, from the broad yet detailed knowledge of all the essentials of his business, to the long list of community work responsibilities, sporting achievements, numerous books and papers on many aspects of Japanese Art and Culture, his success in the Roxburghe and Japan societies. Any tycoon can buy a library, but perusal of the list of books sold from Franche Hall in 1922 suggests that his book collection was the life's work of a man who loved and understood beautiful books. The constant stream of visitors, many of great erudition, who came to view the Japanese collection are a tribute to the skill with which it was assembled, catalogued and displayed.

## Chapter 5

### The Environment in which Annie lived

Annie's life in her diary is mainly centred round her home. She loved her beautiful gardens at Franche Hall, and she had a special awareness of, and an acute delight in, watching the natural progress of the seasons. In her diary each year she notes the first swallow she saw, the first cuckoo she heard, the coming out of the Gloire de Dijon rose by the drawing room; the last fine red rose she gathered out of doors before the onset of winter, the coming of the mushrooms, the ripening of the blackberries, the flowering of the hawthorn and the chestnut and other such details. She derived particular satisfaction from the glory of the golden russet hues of the autumn leaves, and particular pride in watching the growth of the woods and ornamental trees which she and Michael had so extensively planted.

In 1884 Annie's village of Franche was separated from the borough of Kidderminster by a wide belt of green fields. Kidderminster itself was a modest township with a population which stayed between 1881 and 1911 at about 24,000 people. Over the same period the rateable value grew from about seventy to ninety thousand pounds. In area it was quite small, some 2,500 acres; so Annie had many of the advantages of the country way of life combined with reasonable proximity to a local shopping area.

To read the methodically compiled and carefully checked lists of the Franche Hall possessions is like browsing in some medieval manuscript list of a Chancellor or College Bursar. For example, the list of jam in stock in February 1886 comprised 226 items:

Black Currant Jelly	10	Blackberry Jelly	29	Crown Imperial	8
Raspberry	10	Damson Cheese	4	Marmalade	39
Black Currant	12	Orleans Plum	15	Blackberry	7
Raspberry N. B.C.	7	Greengage	2	Strawberry	12
Gooseberry	11	Apri cot	5	G. Gooseberry	3
Red Currant Jelly	12	Washington Plum	6	From 1884:	
Gooseberry Jelly	12	Domsons,	14	Raspberry	5
				Strawberry	3

and in 1888 she had 49 lbs of tea in stock.

Each year she lists when the children went to the dentist and what they had done, which illnesses they had, for example in 1886, all except Martin had had chicken pox, and all except Geoffrey and Martin, whooping cough. Then the lists of servants, the Cook list runs: Sarah Price 1882, Anne Abberley 1884, Eliza Coombes 1885, Mary Smith 1885, Edith Ballard Emma Arley and Sarah Adams until 1887. Then the wages, 1894, carefully in French for secrecy: Mrs. Barber, trente cinq, Eliza, dix; Elizabeth, vingt deux, Mary, onze; presumably pounds per year. Then her China, dinner service, 31 soup plates, 29 pudding plates, 20 cheese plates, 45 meat plates and 16 salad plates, with a note to buy some replacements; the vaccination dates of each child. Then notes on tradesman suppliers, three of which are still in business locally, Oakes for furniture, Hepworths for stationery, and Rays for special bread supplies. Annually she noted her success in obtaining discounts from suppliers, typically:-

Ironmonger	5 %	Packwoods	5 %	Waldron	5%,
Isaacs	2½%	Coles	2½%	Bennett	5%
				M'Candlass	5%

There is perhaps a touch of the Brig Ann, as she laid the landau alongside the local tradesmen's shops, and they come out to ascertain her wants and show her their wares, while protocol required that she preserve all the elegant decorum of a Victorian lady, underneath she enjoyed a deal as much as her husband, and when she achieved one can imagine her laughing to herself, just as Matthew Stonehouse, when he got a good bargain victualling his ship. Old Sid Simmonds, the charming Kidderminster butcher remembered her well, and used to enjoy the twinkle in her eye when they reached agreement at what she had calculated was a good price for some Franche Hall meat supplies.

Besides running Franche Hall, its internal staff, its garden, its home farm, and recording the financial accounts of each operation, she also ran a country house for the family. For Michael, his sons, friends and business associates, it was a Sporting Lodge where he could get a complete change from the pressures of his mainstream life.

Annie used to dissipate her stresses amongst the wild flowers, the foxgloves, the primroses, the trees and the mushrooms, and she kept a separate diary in the country which is concerned not with manufacturers meetings or Municipal banquets, but with the softness of the weather, with walks to see the progress of a draining or a fencing project, the height and colour of the river, and the pool or run where the brown trout were rising and swimming.



After several rents, they made a purchase of a country House, Chilton, near Cleobury Mortimer. The road to Chilton lay to the west through the Royal Borough of Bewdley where once the sailing barges were loaded for Bristol to feed the Black Country hardware to the colonists of the New World. Through the old Royal Forest of Wyre where depredations of the deer were the despair of the surrounding farmers, and where some flora and fauna rare and lovely still flourish in spite of the stream of black country boys and girls who regard it as an area more useful for defloration. Then finally a long grassy centred winding laney road led to Chilton.

## **Chapter 6**

### **The Staff for which Annie was responsible**

Annie herself as well as the gracious beautiful and cultured hostess, the loving wife, and the devoted parent, was the manager of a staff who at one time numbered 30 people, not all of whom were either full time or actual employees of hers. Like any other tribe of people they needed to have their rank, routine, duties, authority and responsibilities properly defined.

In later years Annie had about 10 people actually responsible to her. At Franche Hall the Cook, the Housemaid, parlourmaid, laundrywomen; the Chilton housekeeper, and then particularly when Michael was away, there was the coachman, the groom, the head gardener, the two farm bailiffs, one at Chilton and one at Franche, and less directly the two keepers at Chilton and Bickley.

Of course, when they were first married they had hardly any staff or money to pay them with; and towards the end, due to wartime economic and manpower factors, staff was short. The peak period was about 1900 to 1914 when Michael and Annie were still young enough to have many friends who enjoyed a good party, when extensive community and sporting commitments were superimposed on business responsibilities, when not only their children but also their children's friends, spouses, children and prospective in laws all used Franche Hall as their hotel as well as their home. In the midst of all this Annie always kept the main control of all purchasing in her own hands, based on a daily morning conference with the cook to plan the production of between 50 and 100 meals a day.

From this conference emerged the following day's menus and shopping lists. A good chef makes a good restaurant; a good cook by her ability to get the best out of her staff, preserve a happy atmosphere in the servants hall, minimise waste and enhance Annie's reputation for serving outstandingly good simple plain English food could make the reputation of Franche Hall parties.

Annie never felt she needed anything so prestigious as a butler, and until Michael's illness towards the end of his life when he had a valet, there were no living in male servants.

This avoided the danger of a stream of junior pretty maids being packed off pregnant in Hansom Cabs, a sad facet of some great establishments, though Annie was quite capable of putting her sons, or anyone else in their place, if there was any suspicion.

The cook had under her two girls, one to prepare all the vegetables the gardeners brought in, the meat from Chilton, the bread making, and keeping the great stove stacked up with coals. The other operated the scullery, doing the washing up from the kitchen and the servants hall, and helping the housemaid with the bedrooms in between. After the cook was the head parlourmaid with an assistant. For the latter part of Annie's life she had a jewel in the kindly, but very firm, ascetic, slim, upright, black haired Parker. She was responsible for the dining room, the pantry, the waiting at table, the care of all the china, glass, silver, plate and cutlery, and the serving of the wines (probably prepared by Michael or one of the sons). If she imbibed a bit herself she would take jolly good care nobody else did without permission. She would draw up the menus to Annie's directions, then the success of a dinner party rested on close collaboration between parlourmaid and the cook. Approximately equal in rank, if they happened to be a pair of sour old pussies, what wonderful opportunities for guerilla warfare existed between them. If the joint operation suffered, Annie would have to deal with it, but if they were clever it might go on for years.

Third in the establishment was the chief housemaid. The housemaids were responsible to Annie for all the cleaning of the "front" part of the house, for the bed making, the linen, the preparation of guest rooms, the dusting of the valuables in the drawing room and the library, and any of the mending of the linen etc. that wasn't done out. They carried up the water for the hip baths and emptied the chamber pots; they usually wore flowered calico dresses with white aprons. The chief housemaid was a key person, if anyone was meditating an affair with anyone else it was she who would spot it and report it to Annie.

She had all the dirty linen put in baskets to be taken to the Franche Hall Laundry. This was in Lowe Lane, at the back of the stables where the Tynings estate is now. Here two women, one older, one younger, worked all the week in a warm steamy atmosphere on the households dirty linen; only later was the steam laundry in the town entrusted with certain items.

Outside in the garden, the head gardener had three, or at one time four, under gardeners to direct. He in turn was responsible to Annie for the general strategy, and with her observant eye he wouldn't get away with much.

When there was a big job like building a rockery, Michael would lead the whole family into action. Both he and Annie greatly enjoyed the fruits of the garden, and Franche Hall was particularly famous for its fine crop of strawberries.

In the greenhouses were grown grapes, peaches, nectarines and particularly orchids. Annie had a special man to look after the orchids who on account of his pale face and highly squeaky voice was popularly, but quite wrongly, supposed by the school children to be an eunuch!

Franchise Hall had one coachman, who was responsible for the coach, its harness and its general accoutrements, and for driving it on all formal occasions. Annie's forbearance with her staff is illustrated by the story of one of her coachmen, she finally had to give the man notice because she had to hire a cob in a rush to take her to the station to catch a train, as her coachman was unable to drive her; because for the third time in one year he had to admit that he had pawned his employer's harness for the sake of a good booze up.

Under the coachman the care, the health, and the husbandry, of the horses, was the groom and the stables his domain; it was for him to arrange with Annie the supply of fodder for them, and the disposal of their manure. The groom was answerable for the silky sheen of the equine coats, the brushing of their tails and the combing of their manes, the rumbles in their tummies and the brightness of their eyes, the minding of their feet and the timing of their shoeing.

Like most families Annie's children enjoyed the exercise of skill and sense of power to be obtained from driving, and they often took her in the pony carriage over to their country house at Chilton. Annie managed Chilton house and farm through a bailiff, and she regularly checked and settled the careful accounts she required him to keep; there was also a man and his wife whose work was running the house, the cooking and the cleaning, but if there was a big house party some of the Franche Hall staff were brought over to help. Part of the bailiff's mandate was the Franche meat supply, and a carcass of fresh meat was sent over every week, winter and summer, to fill the bellies of the great household. One good joint was always cut off and sent up to Michael's brother John in appreciation of the many services he rendered the family.

When he had time and it wasn't too far, Michael enjoyed walking, and he always got Franche Hall up sufficiently early in the morning so that he could walk from his home down Marlpool Lane, past the Infirmary, along Mill Street and into the only really architecturally homogenous and attractive street that Kidderminster possesses - Church Street, where he had acquired a nice old four storied period house for Tomkinson & Adam's offices. Behind the offices ran the river Stour down to join the Severn at Stourport; Church Street was itself a little community well acquainted with each other. The east side was occupied by doctors, dentists, a bank, a church, and the lawyers such as Talbots; the west side mostly belonged to Tomkinson & Adam, there were also some family owned shops and the Borough rates office in the charge of Michael's friend, Mr. Dick Grove.

As gradually motor cars superceded the carriages, Franche Hall took on a chauffeur, a Mr. Mant, with the delightful Christian name of Gabriel. Gabriel Mant became a family friend, with a total lack of excessive respect for wealth or rank. After he had driven Franche Hall guests to the station and safely consigned them to their train he acquired a habit of passing epigrammatic and dry witticisms at their expense, and over the years the high quality of his satire achieved him considerable licence, but the villagers of Franche didn't let him have it all his own way. The car in which Gabriel Mant drove his employer Michael Tomkinson had a marvellously musical horn, and this warning of approach gave rise to a local jest: "*Listen, here comes Saint Michael with the Angel Gabriel blowing his trumpet*", and that was almost the only family wind instrumental association for, apart from Herbert, none of them belonged to the fox hunting fraternity, and their main winter sport was the shooting. The keepers and their staffs were a substantial item on the payroll.

The keepers commonly received their wages from John Tomkinson or Mr. Smith the agent. Frequently the children used to go the rounds and enjoyed visiting the houses and exploring round about while perhaps John T. had a whisky in the house. There were two head keepers, one based on Chilton having charge of Prescott, Reaside, Nethercott and the Hopton rents; and the other having the larger area round Bickley, including Milson, Coreley, Mayhill, Newnham, and Neen Sollars, together with John Tomkinson's land between Neens Hill, Newnham Bridge and Broombank, some of it owned, some rented; it amounted to an administrative area of about 5,000 acres.

Occasionally other shoots such as Witley Court where King Edward VII came to shoot were also rented; at one time to the east of Chilton part of the Kinlet woods were rented off the Childe family; there don't seem to be any records of any sport there in terms of pheasants winged or partridges beseiged, but Mrs. Childe, the widow of Kinlet Hall, was reputed to be one of the most interesting, attractive, amusing and delightful ladies of the district.

The keepers were men of standing, trust and prestige, naturally they kept the poachers at bay, but that unpleasant task was but a small part of the job. The main shooting season was over by February, and from then until September was a continuous and carefully planned strategy of preparing for the next autumn's shoot, while keeping an eye on the summer trout fishing.

The pheasant, with its fine stature, and the unsurpassed glory of its colouring, one of the greatest beauties of the English countryside, has such inefficient survival techniques, that without the protection that keepers provides, it would be likely to become extinct in the wild state. The keepers kept such wild life as preyed too heavily on their game in check, and the natural stock of game was carefully husbanded and increased and game eggs not likely to be reared by their parents were raised under broody hens. For the pheasants the main effort was at Bickley, while Chilton was good land for the partridges which are more able to look after themselves; grouse, wild duck, woodcock, hares and rabbits also made their contribution to the larder.

The keepers besides having a deep knowledge of the haunts and habits of the wild life round them, and the characteristics of the land at their disposal, also knew the keepers of the surrounding estates, the men who farmed the land, and the considerations of forestry. Finally, on the appointed day the keeper planned the tactics of the shoot, there were the beaters to be hired - men who knew the countryside so as to produce the birds at the right place and time; not too many birds must be killed or there would be a shortage next year, not too few or there might be a shortage in the larder, a balance of conservation. If a gun instead of killing birds outright or letting them go, were to wound them, whoever he might be, he got the rough side of the keeper's tongue without much respect, or by your leave Sir!

While Annie often supervised the male staff, with her female staff Annie did the whole hiring, management and training, calculated their wages and insurance, put up the money and handed it over, kept the records and balanced the cash, a part of which came from the property rents paid in to her.

It is interesting how self contained such a labour intensive community could be; not only vegetables, fruit, meat, milk, butter, cheese, bread and beer came from Franche Hall resources, but the whole community was more self sufficient. Take nails as an example, instead of going to a shop in Kidderminster it was easier to go to the blacksmith in Franche Road, next to the wheelwright, and ask him to use some of his wire of the right thickness for you, to make your nails to the length and shape you wanted.

The Franche Hall staff basically provided the administrative background for Michael's business. The main body of guests were the steady stream of customers who came by train to visit the showrooms in Church Street; many of these lunched, dined and slept at Franche Hall, and this hospitality was particularly useful to those from abroad. One manufacturer, who was not as successful as Michael at attracting the buyers to his showroom, used to find out the train of the buyers arrival, and lay his carpet patterns out on the station platform so that they had to be seen, and hoped to fill his order book before leaving the railway station.

Other guests would be competitors discussing terms of trade, licensing agreements, etc., suppliers of machinery, jute, cotton, wool; or those looking for agencies or jobs; their reception was all part of Annie's life on which the success of Tomkinson & Adam depended. Then, of course, there were family friends, visitors to the library and the Japanese collection, fellow councillors and magistrates, local and central government officials; the hospitality was simple and good, and everyone received a warm welcome.

Annie was a gifted organiser, knowing the strength and weakness of each one of her staff, never suffering fools gladly, but praising and rewarding good service, and helping the sick and elderly. She operated so that her husband was totally free of detailed home worries, so that he could concentrate his whole time and energy, primarily on building up, improving and extending the carpet business.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Annie's Nursery**

Annie was completely devoted to her children, although outwardly she always put her husband first, probably as the years went by, they became the greatest interest in her life. She dreamed and planned for them, and was immensely proud of their achievements. Too clever to have favourites, she just loved them all for themselves.

Up to the age of about 7 to 10 they lived in the day and night nurseries, and were carefully scrubbed and paraded for parental inspection just once a day, more like a Kibbutz than a modern family. They loved their nurses and their nurses worked off their maternal instincts on them.

When she was still at home the eldest daughter Gertrude, taught some of her brothers and sisters the three R's and in some cases much more for Gertrude was a capable teacher. After her came the Governesses.

What a life it must have been for those Victorian Governesses, with no friend in whom to confide, and opposed by a solid phalanx of clever and united children. They were usually ladies from a well educated family who had fallen on hard times. A curious half position, they had their meals served to them in the nursery, and were to some extent treated as one of the family, while the staff took good care they were never allowed to forget that they were employees.

Annie took trouble over the selection of governesses, for she knew the difficulties of their position. They had to be either too old, too disagreeable, too unprepossessing or too strong minded to be successfully propositioned by her sons or their friends, some of whom might have regarded a pretty governess as fair game. Yet at the same time they had to hold the interest of the children and educate them in the joys of learning. Such paradoxes create problems; for example, after the young had succeeded in making life so intolerable for a poor Miss Holford that she gave in her notice, they prepared for her successor. They had a lovely family doll's house, which the Bickley village carpenter had built for them, all carpeted throughout with Tomkinson & Adam's best, this had a blank red end wall.



Their welcome for the next governess was to tell her of the fate of the last, and they gave her the message on that end wall of the doll's house: "Miss Holford left for ever on April 17th, Hurrah! Hurrah!" they wrote in large letters.

There were popular escapes from authority; when there was a full house at Franche, or Annie wanted to avoid them all getting measles at once, some would be packed off to the kindly hospitality of Michael's brother, Uncle John, or further away to Chilton.

Ultimately, of course, Victorian parents kept their young under control. The night nursery was immediately over their parents bedroom, so nocturnal adventures were only likely to go undetected if they were conducted in silence. They invented a game, best played in the dark, involving jumping from bed to bed without touching the floor; any misjudgement, of course, caused a resounding bump on the floor and shrieks of merriment. Michael was a beautiful calligrapher and wrote a huge notice in his best gothic writing in red paint: "Remember keep quiet", and hung it up on their wall, but the effectiveness soon wore off.

Another time when Michael was away on one of his business selling trips the young decided on that old frolic of a midnight feast. They accumulated candles, food and drink, and smuggled them via the night nursery, which was at the top of the house up the roof maintenance access ladder into the loft. There they were squatting on the rafters having a wonderful time until the revels got so loud that Annie heard them.

She got Gerald the eldest at home to hold the young ladies legs, because their kicking was more than she could cope with, while she beat their bottoms with one of her shoes. Usually Michael did the chastisement; he belted the boys and smacked the girls with a bedroom slipper. He started with the eldest involved on the basis that they ought to know better, and in cases of mass wickedness his heart melted so that the youngest got off scot free. The great thing about this sort of punishment was that as soon as it was over all was forgotten and forgiven and friendly until next time.

Even in so well run a nursery as that of Franche Hall there were occasional problems. Annie's son Geoffrey at one time was rather poorly and very thin, so Annie took him to the doctor for a check up. After a careful examination the doctor reported to everyone's amazement that he was starving.

Investigations revealed that the youngest members of the family sat furthest from the food, and the elder brothers and sisters had been failing to ensure that the young Geoffrey at the bottom got his share. After this was remedied he made excellent progress.

The nursery window had a good view of the yard, and once while Mrs. Jimmy Humphries was taking tea with Annie, they saw her coachman attending his horses. Instead of his usual smart turnout his top hat seemed too big for him. The servants hall grapevine had the story; the day before, full of a good lunch he had fallen asleep in his seat on the landau while waiting for his mistress to put the finishing touches to her decor. Young son, Herbert Humphries, was unable to resist his opportunity, and while the good man slept he ran the horse clippers smartly through his ample locks, with the sad result that his tall hat could only rely for support on his ears!

## **Chapter 8 (part one)**

### **The Society in which they lived**

Annie and Michael enjoyed a party, and perhaps had a typical Franche Hall dinner party in the eighteen eighties. Their guests might have been:-

Mr. and Mrs. John Brinton.. John Brinton was at this time the King of Kidderminster, Liberal M.P. for the town, J. P., D. L. Etc. by his great abilities he had made Brintons one of the great carpet firms of the world, he was now in his prime and he held on to power for over 50 years. Brintons, among other claims to fame, were plagued with fires and had a special fire bell, so that Kidderminster fire brigade alarm whistle code was as follows: for country fires a 60 second blast, for town fires a 30 second blast followed by a 15 second silence followed by another 30 second blast, but Brintons had the prerogative of a quite prolonged fire whistle blast uniquely to themselves! John Brinton had helped Michael when he started up and the two remained good friends.

George William Grosvenor, and his lady, head of Woodward Grosvenors, Mayor and distinguished Freemason, was a fine presence, and Mrs. Grosvenor was one of Annie's special friends. Like Annie she was by nature quiet, modest and retiring, yet at the same time an excellent organiser and rather well read. James Pamphlet Morton was a well known local solicitor, and a great pal of Michael's brother John.

Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Baldwin had built up their steel business in Stourport, and Mrs. Alfred came of a particularly interesting family (see chapter 19). Their son Stanley was a friend of Annie's and Michael's and later of Herbert's at Astley.

Mr. Southwell, the friendly carpet manufacturer from Bridgnorth, who seemed to have such a capacity for enjoyment of a party that, when he came to dinner, he usually stayed the night. The Southwells like the Tomkinsons were keen on cricket, and besides talking cricket at dinner parties, they started an annual cricket match which took place for nearly 50 years.

The last two guests were Mr. and Mrs. Jimmy Humphries, whose firm was James Humphries, specialists in Wilton carpets. Jimmy Humphries often shot, fished and played tennis with the Tomkinsons. Jimmy Humphries and Herbert Tomkinson were very wily tennis players using clever and accurate placing of the ball in preference to brute force.

Jimmy was a great enthusiast for the early sports Rolls Royces, which he used to drive in a most exciting manner. Once out shooting he unwittingly allowed the Tomkinson young, to their wicked amusement, to entice him to park his beautiful car in a bog, which caused considerable consequent extrication problems.

Jimmy's brother, Herbert Humphries, was a gay and colourful character, who one night fought a great fisticuff with his firm's blacksmith under the gas lamp in the Bull Ring in Kidderminster. What a fight it must have been, the two contestants stripped to the waist, and all their supporters gathered round placing bets.

When Herbert Humphries came to work next morning his father couldn't fail to notice the scars of the conflict on his face. Naturally, his father's enquiries elicited a blow by blow account of the fight from the bystanders. Unfortunately this was by no means Herbert's first scrape, so the story goes that his father gave him £100 and a one way ticket to Australia, and packed him off straightaway before anything further could happen. It is said that Herbert lost his money gambling on the boat, but being a very musical young man he kept hold of his violin. On arrival at Melbourne he had the good fortune to find that the post of assistant organist in the Cathedral was vacant, which well suited his talents. Unfortunately during one service he got so bored with the sermon that he slipped out of the organ loft, and came upon the row of worthy top hats on the hat pegs at the back of the choir. Of course, Herbert couldn't resist the temptation to go along the line of toppers, popping the peg through the top of each high hat in turn; after which he wisely decided to move on to New Zealand.

In New Zealand he got a job with an elderly solicitor, who took a real liking to this able young man. Herbert got himself qualified, and with the passage of the years became senior partner in the law firm, and a much respected citizen, living in the bosom of his large family until the ripe old age of 94.

To return to our dinner party, it would have taken place in the oak panelled dining room at Franche Hall which at capacity could accommodate about 26 people; this time they seem to have sat down about 12, a comfortable number that allowed good elbow room. The table was covered with a large white linen table cloth, and laid with silver bearing the family crest of a wolf's head, which fits rather neatly on to the handle, whatever the modern girls might say about it.

The cut glass came from some good friends in the Stourbridge glass business, and as Michael at one time had a close association with the Royal Worcester porcelain works, the dinner service may have been specially designed and made for him. The dining chairs were not antiques, but good solid well made ones constructed to stand up to the rigours of a rumbustious party, leather covered on both back and seat. In cold weather there would be great fires burning at both ends of the dining room, each protected by a massive fine mesh fire guard topped with brass. The flames roaring up the chimney breasts at each end of the room gave a fine atmosphere of jovial warmth and goodwill, a good beginning to a successful party.

While there would have been menu cards on the table which enabled you to save up your appetite for the things you fancied, a Franche Hall menu would not have been at all on the scale of the ten course dinners one associates with the public banquets of the era. If it opened with some soup, followed by fish, then perhaps partridges, then a great undercut of beef, then one of Annie's famous apple pies, with fruit and cheese to finish off, that would be an unusually long menu. At parties the routine of the correct wine for each course would have to be followed, but really Michael liked his whisky; and when the family were on their own, he used to produce a tall tumbler of etched glass into which he poured his ration of Scotch and topped it up with soda. Annie preferred a glass of claret.

Franché Hall cellars held the usual bins of vintage port, purchased in fairly large quantities when there was a promising year, held to maturity, and drunk thereafter in the later stages of dinner parties after the ladies had retired to the drawing room. While most guests survived tolerably sober as far as the port, it was the port that sorted out the ones who made use of the spare bedrooms, prepared for such eventualities, and stayed the night.

Franché had a spacious entrance hall with the stairs and landing going round it in a William Morris sort of way. The landing therefore offered a grandstand view of all the coming and goings, and naturally the children, who had been given their early nursery supper, used to await a safe moment to slip out of their bedrooms, into their dressing gowns and on to the landing to watch. Perhaps occasionally as she left the dining room Annie would take pity on them, and if it was a sober and intimate party, perhaps one or two might be allowed down for a few minutes to sit on either side of their father.

They had a job to do, to peel his walnuts which he loved to have with his port, and in return they would be allowed a sip of port each before being packed off to bed again.

The maids would be wearing neat black dresses with starched white aprons and caps, black stockings and shoes. If it was just a family party Michael had a brown velvet coat in which he felt comfortable.

In the morning those of the guests who had stayed the night would come down to a good substantial English breakfast; places were laid on the white cloths all round the table and you sat wherever you liked. On the side board there was porridge to start with; then there were silver entree dishes with lids, kept hot on a heated copper stand, and a huge silver egg shaped dish. From all of these you were expected to help yourself. For access to the egg shaped dish the top slid round underneath the bottom, to reveal such home grown delicacies as were in season from mushrooms, eggs, trout, sausages, bacon, devilled chicken legs, etc. There would also be toast and marmalade in bulk, because the family had an inordinate habit of putting more marmalade on than there was toast, and Annie's recipe for home made marmalade was renowned.

There were many other ways in which friends met together. Formal calling was still the commonest, then there were tea parties, garden parties, afternoon parties, evening parties, balls, dances, sporting occasions, etc. In February 1887, a fairly typical month, Annie had seven guests who slept the night at Franche Hall, 7 dinner parties, 2 dances, one soirée, and 17 callings.

## **Chapter 8 (part two)**

### **The Society in which they lived – Protocol**

One of the biggest differences between 1890 and now is the comparative freedom we now have from protocol.

Before the company went into a dinner party they had all been paired off by Michael and Annie, and each gentleman was discreetly deputed to take a lady on his arm into dinner. The order in which they entered the dining room, and in which they sat, was precisely regulated according to their social status, and terrible umbrage could be given by a mistake. Most people changed for dinner every night, and a tail coat was worn for all occasions of any importance; for a visit to the opera there was the famous opera hat, a spring loaded top hat, which collapsed to fit under the seat.

At the end of the dinner when the time came for port, Annie gave a discreet signal to the other ladies, for which they had been waiting, and the ladies retired to the drawing room, leaving the gentlemen to enjoy the main drinking session of the evening, their port. This would not normally take less than forty minutes, and some times the gentlemen never joined the ladies at all, a most frustrating state of affairs for some young buck who wanted to chat up his girl.

The family, or at any rate the daughters and some parents, went to the Worcester Hunt Ball in their carriage. As the horses mustn't be kept waiting up too late, the carriage load often left about two a.m., so any sons who wanted to stay to the end, had to come home independently, probably in an open dog cart.

At the Hunt Ball there was a couch on a sort of low dais customarily reserved for only the most socially elite ladies' use. What a chatter there was when someone considered insufficiently precedential was seen to take a place on this settee!

On arrival at a ball or dance everyone was given a programme. Early on in the evening the gentlemen went round the ladies with whom they wished to dance, and if the lady was so inclined she wrote in her programme his name after the number of the dance(s) requested. Naturally, the best looking girls quickly had full programmes (or pretended they had until the beau of their choice came along). Woe betide the homely girls who spent the evening with empty programmes sitting or standing with their mothers round the walls watching their more fortunate sisters pirouetting on the floor.

For dancing the gentlemen put on white kid gloves, they also brought two or three spare stiff collars with them in a collar box, and when the heat of the exertion of dancing had softened their collar, they slipped out and changed into one of their spares.

On warm sunny summer afternoons, garden parties were most delightful occasions. The refreshments were usually Claret cup, Hock cup, Peaches and Strawberries, with excellent home made ice creams. A section of one of the regimental bands was often hired to play. Uniforms were much more worn and gayer. Michael as a deputy Lieutenant, wore a fine top hat with feathers, a scarlet tail coat, black trousers, and an ornamental belt. As High Sheriff he would wear a cockade in his hat. The Volunteers would wear their gay uniforms on the slightest provocation, and were considered to look most romantic in them.

From a ladies point of view, although the long dresses and bustles, tight corsets and numerous underclothes of the time must have been extremely restricting; contemporary dresses had one advantage, they were not mass produced. Ladies either made their own clothes, or had them hand made by some little dressmaker; as was common practice in France until quite recently. In this way dresses usually had a definite individuality, and when a girl had found an approach that suited her, she might well adhere to its general effect for most of her life. Annie in 1884 had a Mrs. Morris who used to make up her dresses, and for extravagances, a London dressmaker also. Annie had very petite elegant feet, and Michael liked to buy her the loveliest shoes he could find, from Pinets in Bond Street.

It was still usual to eat fish on Fridays, and Mr. James Amphlett Morton was well known for his famous Friday oyster supper, for which he used to search the country to get the largest possible lobster for the centerpiece of his feast, it was a party that Michael and Annie always enjoyed. John Tomkinson was a particular friend of Mr. Morton's, and with Jimmy Humphries and others made up a famous poker school. Mr. Morton lived at Paxton where there is a big steep bank, and coming back late one night, he and his pony and his pony carriage missed the way and rolled down the bank, somehow they all survived, and with the utmost determination Mr. Morton climbed back into the remnants of his trap, whipped up his pony, and got home under his own steam.



It was all surprisingly inexpensive; Edward James Morton, head of the Morton carpet firm, lived at Heathfield, Wolverley, and in 1910 he had 6 inside servants, 2 coachmen, 3 gardeners, and 6 horses. They lived well and happily, gave generously to their less well off relations and to charity, and did the lot on £2,500 per year.

At Lea Castle the Brown Westheads kept a butler and a footman, and it was a condition of employment that, whether they liked it or not, they attended Wolverley Church for divine service at least once every Sunday.

There were various esoteric ways in which individuality was shown. The coachmen had turned down tops to their high leather boots, and some employers liked to show their taste in the colour of the turndowns, some supplied boots with brown turndowns, some pink.

## Chapter 9

### Annie and Michael's life 1871 to 1914

They were exciting days, full of disease, violence, danger, dishonesty, poverty, progress and opportunity. First there was the health risk, there was a serious epidemic in Kidderminster of typhoid fever and small pox, over 1884 to 1886, and Annie was just as concerned as any other mother in the district lest her young should contract one of the dread diseases; from which quite a few citizens died. The typhoid fever was thought to have been connected with the town's sewage system, and Franche as yet was blessed with neither mains drainage, nor mains water.

Then there was the major strike at the carpet factory of Henry Jecks Dixon, partly over the employment of women weavers at a lower rate than men. Poor old Mr. Dixon was besieged in his offices by an angry assembly of some 2,000 strikers and their supporters, and when he finally attempted to leave, although the police tried to protect him from the violence of the crowd, he was seriously assaulted and injured. A number of cases came before the magistrates but little good to anyone came of it; and it was not long after that the firm went out of business, causing further hardship.

Then in July 1886 there was the great fire at Watson Spinning Mill. "At 11.20 the fire alarm shrieked through the summer's night, a pillar of luminous cloud rose far into the sky, and a large proportion of the population were grouped in amazement watching the most terrific spectacle ever witnessed in Kidderminster. As the telegraph office was closed Mr. Fawke was dispatched on horseback to Stourbridge for the steam fire engine, which came very quickly, and was later joined by the Worcester one; Morton, Brintons, and Woodward Grosvenors brigades, also gave welcome help.

Flames poured out of every window in the New Road end of the building. As floor after floor fell the machinery could be heard crashing horribly into the flaming chaos beneath. Presently the flames reached the turret, and the roof fell in with a far sounding crash. The heavy pediment surmounting the front tottered, and then fell with a majestic movement; but all the time the brave firemen continued to play water on Lord Wards shed opposite, with quiet orderliness and self possession.

*Willis's weaving shed was protected by a branch of the River Stour, but the firemen playing water on the end of Willis's had buckets of water thrown over them to enable them to stand the roasting. Suddenly the north and south walls of Watsons crumbled, fortunately without damaging T. & A. Naylor's.*

*Universal sympathy was felt for R. & H. Watson for a loss estimated at over £80,000; and the 500 hands they employ will also suffer, the non receipt of the weekly wage will bring severe distress to many families. It had been a fine five storey building 250 feet long by 80 feet wide with about 260 windows, and walls 22 inches thick, with 26 carding engines and 80 spinning frames destroyed. "*

There was also great progress, the opening of the new telephone exchange, the construction of a new crown general post office in Exchange Street, and the old wooden railway viaduct at Hoobrook was replaced by a new one of arched construction containing seven million bricks.

To return from the general scene to Michael and Annie's life. After their marriage Michael had brought Annie home to Sunnyside, a rather rambling semi Georgian white stuccoed house, with 6 bedrooms and suitable staff quarters, which was conveniently next door to Franche Church. When she starts her diary in 1884 Annie had born Michael 9 children, leaving 4 to come; one, Harry had died in 1883, the other 8 were in good shape. Sunnyside was not a very elegant or convenient house, and as the family grew and business prospered, it was natural that they should look for somewhere better; so in 1882 they had moved a few hundred yards up the road towards Waverley to Franche Hall, a substantial Victorian mansion built of dark red brick, with a slate roof, and a rather pleasant stone pillared porch. Franche Hall had a curtailage of about 16 acres and a home farm of nearly 100 acres. Annie took an interest in the gardens, and perhaps by relaxing in them she found a way of escaping from the stresses of her life, and a subject of common interest with the local people of Franche and her many other friends. Michael and Annie made a number of additions and alterations to Franche Hall, of which the finest was the museum gallery built to house their Japanese collection,

Annie unfortunately was not a descriptive diarist, she merely noted her engagements, accounts, records and commitments and on January 18th, 1884 she notes that she gave a children's party for her family who ranged from 11 years old to a few months; with the guests and their staffs the whole event must have been about 40 people strong.

The next day she gave a tea party to the children of Franche School. With her great interest in education she had a close relationship with several of the local schools and, naturally, Franche village school, which lay nearly opposite her front gates, was her special interest, Michael seems to have come along himself and helped. He also brought two helpers, an old friend of the family, Mr. Awdrey and Mr. Maitland Kempson. Mr. Kempson, a great carpet trade character, became the spearhead of Woodward Grosvenors marketing, and on one occasion when the firm was heavily overstocked with carpet, and short of money, he enterprisingly hired the Town Hall and advertised a colossal sale of carpets. Special trains were hired to bring in the horny handed, black faced high earning skilled craftsmen from the black country, and so many came that the Town Hall was packed up to the gallery. Mr. Kempson quickly saw that what he had thought to be a vast stock wasn't going to satisfy the golden guineas this gathering was ready to lay out. Sensing the enthusiasm of his audience each carpet put up for auction was offered in duplicate; the second to be delivered when made; he had a complete sell out, with enough orders for some time to come, a fine bag of gold to bank, and a lot of satisfied customers. History, however, doesn't relate how he explained it to his regular buyers, perhaps his stock was all discontinued lines.

The same day as the school party saw the landau take a party up to the station, Annie's sisters Pattie and Lizzie were returning to Wakefield after a stay at Franche taking Annie's 3½ year old son Raymond with them for a holiday with the Stonehouses. Pattie was very useful at Franche because she was quick, well educated and neat, and was largely responsible for the cataloguing and the maintenance of the Japanese collection.

Pattie was immortalised by a saying; often at night she was present for the children ritual drinking of their bedtime glass of milk, then Pattie used to tell them, "you must always drink your milk slowly, otherwise it will give you a horrible colic like horses get". Effective - Geoffrey remembered his Auntie Pattie and drank his milk slowly to the end of his life!

The most popular Stonehouse sister was Emily, who loved and was loved by Annie's children so much that she came to live permanently at Kidderminster and died there.

Annie records the weekly offertory, she attended Franche Church every Sunday; except for those that sat in the choir they all sat in the churchwardens' pews in the south west corner of the church.

On Sunday evenings she used to balance up the church accounts and often the priest in charge was a friend of the family and would join them for supper to discuss church affairs.

Such a friend was Mr. Charles Stockdale, who was a very fine figure of a man with an immensely bald head, which to the delight and fascination of the school children was crowned by a truly magnificent wart. A Stockdale sister, a nun who stayed at Franche, was greatly admired because she had survived the siege of Ladysmith, it was believed, intact. Mr. Stockdale moved on to be Vicar of Stoke Prior, dying in retirement in Worcester in the nineteen fifties. He used to dine with Michael's brother John at High Habberley, and as was expected of a guest in those days dined well.

It is said that little John Tomkinson and his housekeeper Susan somehow managed to carry the large Mr. Stockdale up the elliptical staircase and get him comfortably to bed. Susan must have been a good housekeeper to John, as High Habberley was always excellently run. When John died in 1924, naturally all his loyal staff came to the funeral, and there was a very good looking young man looking after them, who turned out to be the son of one of them, and nobody knows to this day who the father was.

John features frequently in Annie's diaries, until 1900 he lived at the Beeches, where the Leas subsequently lived, a white square Georgian style house nearly opposite Franche Hall; in 1900 he moved about a mile towards Bewdley to High Habberley which had the advantage of about 120 acres of shooting, and overlooked the local beauty spot of Habberley Valley. John leased the house from the Crane family, and it is still now our family's home.

In the carpet business John acted as a combination of personal assistant to Michael, chief clerk, cashier, and kept in touch with sales. The Adam family had the main responsibility for manufacture, but in Michael's absences on business, John acted for him on the financial, commercial and sales sides. John had two assistants, Mr. Hitchen, who subsequently became secretary of Tomkinsons Limited, and Mr. J.J. Johnson who did the purchasing and was truly one of nature's gentlemen; it was Michael's good fortune to work with such men. As well as being Michael's deputy, John also had two sales pitches; the first was Cooks of Friday Street, London, a fine firm of carpet wholesalers who became at one time Tomkinson & Adam's largest customer; the second was the Channel Islands, an arrangement that combined much of the best in the ways of Victorian business.

John's amiability nourished a good connection with the Channel Island customers, building up a nice business there; however, he usually went for about a month, at an agreeable season, accompanied by one of his friends or sometimes by one of Annie's children, and made an Elysian annual holiday of it coming back refreshed to stand another eleven months of his beloved brother's dynamism. John was also useful to Annie, when her young were in quarantine, for childish diseases like mumps, he used to act as her isolation hospital, which they always much enjoyed.

Annie was also pretty good at the full life, and besides keeping up with Michael, his children, and all their friends, she managed to read and keep up to date with the intellectual world. She lists some of her reading, her friend Rudyard Kipling was perhaps her favourite, she liked George Meredith, George Sand and particularly noted her pleasure in Marivaux's "La Vie de Marianne" (in French), she also enjoyed Robert Louis Stevenson, and most deeply Stendhal's *le Chartreuse de Parme* and "Rouge et Noir." She took longer over Pascal's *Pensees* and, of course, she read a lot of lighter works.

In the cycle of the lives of Annie and Michael the peak lies in this period, probably about 1900. Their last children were born in 1893, Michael fought no more elections after 1904, the completion of the Japanese collection culminated in the publication of the catalogue in 1898. While there isn't a specific point in business, personal relationships between the bosses were most productive in the time of the original partnership; and after about 1900 when the broad spool Axminster loom began to get off the ground, there is no record of any further great and successful innovations. From about 1900 on there is a very gradual sense of freewheeling into old age, occasional sparks still fly, but while the experience and knowledge is available, there doesn't seem to be the same vigour to innovate.

There was a gradual general change in attitude, according to Mrs. Head, up to about 1900 when the villagers met Annie they curtsied and the gentlemen saluted, and Michael was regarded as the Lord of the Manor. The culmination of this was perhaps on Saturday, August 2nd, 1902, when they entertained the whole population of Franche (about 600) to tea at Franche Hall in honour of the Coronation of King Edward VI I, and of the King's recovery from appendicitis; and this was followed by a great bonfire in the evening. In later years as social customs changed it was not always easy for the older generation to change with them.

Throughout their lives Annie and Michael held the great Victorian belief that business was the backbone of the nation, and their whole well-being rested on Tomkinson & Adam's success. Though T. & A. were constantly evaluating and marketing new lines the core of their prosperity remained in the spool Axminster loom. About 1900-1903 the bulk produced seamless Axminster bordered square began to come on the market; but Chenille carpet, and hand made rugs continued to be important.

A good medium priced spool Axminster carpet, 27 inches wide, per lineal yard, cost in 1893, three shillings and one penny, in 1914 four shillings and one penny, in 1920 twelve shillings and one penny, and in 1972 two pounds and forty pence. T. & A. still traded entirely through the retail and wholesale; and never normally direct to the public.

Most of the carpet firms in Kidderminster continued to be family owned and run, and the relationship between staff and employees was a very personal one; often carried on from generation to generation. When Joshua Adams, the Arch Hill foreman attained his fiftieth birthday, the employees raised a subscription for him and presented him with a fine gift of a silver plated Coffee service, and in turn Joshua's son succeeded him as foreman.

The owner managers of the firms usually knew each other, and combined intense competition with good friendship. Gestures of goodwill towards one's fellow citizens were still acceptable; for example, when in 1887 the T. & A. partners decided to celebrate the occasion of Queen Victoria's Jubilee, with the adventure of building a fine new shed to house their fast growing plant of Royal Axminster looms, they gave a most tremendous opening party; and they invited all the old people of Kidderminster to take tea with them in their new building.

## Chapter 10

### A family who enjoyed their sport.

Michael and Annie had been brought up in the ways of the old country sports of the landed gentry; and Michael's predictable reaction to his business success was to invest some of the proceeds in land, so that he could enjoy his shooting and fishing with his friends. Their children got from their parents their love of the country and a delight in country sports, but they also understood that a beautiful horse needed a lot more housing and maintenance, and had a much more limited range than a mere bicycle. Tennis and cricket were complementary to shooting and fishing; they were able to get the best of both worlds, and through opportunity, application and aptitude, there emerged some very notable sportsmen from amongst them.

Shooting was perhaps the great sport of the era; in the diary it began on a larder filling basis, with an 1885 bag of 57 pheasants shot round Neen Sollars over two days, and it gradually grew to the bigger scale of 1905 when round Bickley 403 pheasants were shot in one day. They also went after partridge, grouse, duck, woodcock, pigeon, rook, hares and rabbits, as much for the larder as for the sport.

In the world of fishing, about 6 trout of 10 ounces each is a nice afternoon's work, but during the mayfly season there were much larger catches, in 1886 43 trout were taken in one day at Mawley, in 1905 4 rods brought 56 trout to Chilton. Once at Marlbrook as part of a plan to increase the size of the fish there, 100 little trout were taken in one day. They also caught grayling, pike, perch and the occasional eel.

What was numerically the greatest catch in one day is described by Margaret in a letter to her brother Geoff in Brazil:-

"7.10.1906. Dear Geoff,

*I write to tell you of the girt perch -slog of 1906. All previous records have been utterly broken by the John-bird Marie Ram and myself. We arrived at Bickley by the 10 train, and went down to the lower pool. The fish mostly quite small came out by the dozen. Marie had a huge carp on which broke her all to pieces. After a short break in which we had a heavy meal we again resumed our sport. The fun became fast and furious. Ram caught a slog-doliger weighing 10 ozs, I caught one with a hook and about 2 foot of gut in him. At last 245 the number of the last slog was reached. We got 263 altogether and*



*came home by the 5 train. We fished 4½ hours, which means we caught a fish a minute nearly. We all went to the nest of the John-bird, and celebrated the day by a stout dinner, and a quart of fizzy. One Sunday Ram Marie and I went a long walk. We left Marie at the foot of the Titterstone Clee, and we went to the top and had a glorious view. We rejoined Marie and had lunch, and went back via Sylvington and Oreton. We had G. B. (Ginger Beer) at the Plough Inn. The weather is very hot indeed.....Dodo is still in France and the twins in Yorkshire. Worcester v Warwick is on today, and I would like to go and watch, but Bert says as Warwick are batting and will play for a draw, it will probably be very dull, so I think it is off. I hope your new black steed is well. Much love from Margaret Tomkinson".*

The young lady would then have been 14 years old.

Another of their favourites was cycling, and Raymond kept careful records. While he was at Eton in 1896 his cyclometer and his record book showed:-

Summer holidays 922 miles    Easter holidays 247 miles    Winter holidays 274 miles

Much of it was just transport, to the town, the dentist, Bewdley boating, Chilton or Bickley bird watching, often they went off on expeditions into Wales, to Stratford on Avon, Dover, Folkestone, Wakefield and Scotland. A common arrangement for expeditions was to take two tandems, a party of four. Punctures were not uncommon, and in 1900 Martin's bike broke in two; undeterred he hired another at Alcester and retrieved his own, when it was repaired, on the return journey. Geoffrey during his apprenticeship at Platts, the Oldham engineers, cycled 120 miles home before breakfast, refreshing himself with a drink of milk off a milk cart on the way. After breakfast at Franche he rode on to Chilton for a day's fishing with his brother; what energy. Michael himself was also a keen cyclist and often use to bicycle out to Chilton with the family. On the way to Chilton lies Kinlet Hill, fairly straight and finishing with an uphill the other side; and down Kinlet Martin established the family speed record for a bicycle. Of course, he was the only one who had a speedometer as well as a cyclometer, but forty miles per hour was a big speed in those days and the record stood for some years. What a sense of freedom the bicycle gave after the limitations of walking, railways, and horse drawn vehicles.

Many parts of the countryside, however, can only be seen on foot, and the family enjoyed their walks.

A favourite was to start from Chilton, to climb the two Clee hills and back to Chilton, about 25 miles, some fairly rough going. On Sunday, March 24th, 1901, Raymond and Alice Thompson set off from Chilton at 10. a.m. and reached the top of the Brown Clee where they saw a fox at one o'clock; they topped the Titterstone at 4. p.m. and were back to Chilton by 6. p.m.

Another way of seeing the countryside was by canoeing, and Gerald, often with the Evers family is said amazingly to have negotiated almost every navigable river in the British Isles by canoe. The family also enjoyed hockey, football, skating, golf, tennis, boating and cricket. The rapids of the Severn above Bewdley provided exciting tests of rowing and sculling skill, in which the daughters could be involved, with a view to a picnic perhaps at Arley, and then hard work up stream done, slip down to Bewdley before evening, through such locally famous rapids as Folly and White Horses which had been such a challenge to surmount on the way up.

In cricket one of the main fixtures of the season was the annual match between a Tomkinson family team and the very sporting Kidderminster Police side, usually held at Franche and customarily ending with a great high tea for all connected; great trays of sandwiches, cakes and barrels of beer. On several occasions Michael managed to field eleven of his own family, some of the girls were useful players by any standards, and Michael himself could be a deadly underarm bowler. Another great match was against the Lytteltons of Hagley Hall; the journey was part of the fun and 70 years later Margaret still remembered the thrill of being allowed to sit beside James the coachman and drive the "bus" four-in-hand along the main Birmingham Road, with the rest of the cricket team cheering her on from behind.

For tennis Franche Hall had three or four grass courts, all on the big lawn, and between parties practising and tournaments they got hard wear. Warren Smith from U.S.A., used to be teased with the old story that the only way to get decent turf was to mow it and roll it for two centuries and not even the Americans could do it quicker. Another way in which they played was on the great organ in the Hall at Franche on which Michael particularly enjoyed expressing himself with his old favourites. The more mathematically inclined, on clear evenings used to climb up to the observatory and become amateur astronomers, studying the stars through the astronomical telescope, which was mounted in a swivelling dome.

Apart from Franche, to make a holiday base for his country sport, Michael and Annie in their early years hired, and then later purchased for themselves, a country house. One of their earlier efforts was Sodington Hall.

In January, April and November 1884, the family moved from Franche for their holidays to Sodington, which lies on the Shropshire borders, about ten miles to the west of Kidderminster on the main Tenbury road to Wales. Annie planned the operation with her usual thoroughness, the family with all their baggage and suitable staff went as near as they could by train, then she had arranged for the coachman to meet them, and in several journeys ferried them to Sodington.

Sodington looks like a farm house which has been given prestige by having a rather pretentious classical brick front added about 1800, it was never owned by the family; they rented it several times probably from the Blounts, traditionally the great local landlords, who also owned Mawley Hall. Sodington possessed a moat and a pool but no river fishing, though those two delightful trout streams, the Teme and the Rea are within 3 to 4 miles. Round Sodington there was some excellent pheasant and partridge shooting and some wild duck on the pool. Annie and her young family got a wonderful holiday and the opportunity to acquire country lore, a knowledge of the systems of agriculture on a wider scale than at Franche, the names of new flowers and plants, the ways of wild life, the customs and outlook of the country people, which were a great source of use and pleasure to them all their lives. Annie planned it as just another happy part of her great educational design for them. Michael came over to join them as often as his business commitments permitted. When on their country holidays they would often be joined by their friend Mr. Sparrow, who lived out to the west at Talybont on the Usk; Jack Sparrow was a very large and gentle man. Annie found his good humour most agreeable, while her husband found his deep knowledge of the ways of animals and his unselfishness made him a delightful sporting companion. He was a popular guest with the children, showing them extraordinary patience and kindness, and in return they gave to him - their adoration, and sought his company for their expeditions and adventures; they learnt from him that good sportsmen never kill for the sake of killing and go to great lengths to avoid wounding an animal.

Michael also rented the sporting facilities at Mawley Hall and Hopton Court.

The fishing at Mowley is reputed some of the best on the River Rea, and it was rented for several years from the Blounts, of whom there is a fairy tale that when William Duke of Normandy came over to conquer England, in his train of doughty Knights was Sir Aylmer Blount. Sir Aylmer fought bravely at Hastings, and was loyal in his support of the King, until his turn in the queue came to get rewarded in the usual manner of the times, by being entrusted with lands to hold for the sovereign. By when it was Sir Aylmer's turn the royal party had reached Cleobury Mortimer in Shropshire, and standing on a pretty wooded rise above Cleobury, where now stands Mawley Hall, the King said to Sir Aylmer, *"I entrust you with all the land you can see"*, and it is certainly true that many of the farms which can be seen from Mawley were in past centuries in Blount ownership. The stately pile of Mawley Hall is said to have 365 windows and 52 doors, described as an eighteenth century mansion, designed by Francis Smith of Warwick, with fine period plasterwork and panelling and superb staircase, the balustrade of which is surmounted by an exquisite handrail shaped in the form of an immensely long snake. The gem of a little Manor house in Cleobury Mortimer village was designed by the same architect, and was then occupied by the Trow family, hospitable friends; and the convenience of its location meant that Michael and a friend often repaired there after their sport for a bite of supper and a glass of Whisky or Claret.

Hopton Court, property of the Woodward family was also several times rented by the Tomkinsons; one of its attractions was its fishing on the Mill brook, Where tasty little trout would come on to rise a little earlier than in the river Rea; another draw was its shooting which lay close to the family's Chilton estates. Hopton was an attractive rambling house nestling at the foot of the Clee Hills with its own little village of Hopton Wafers, a self contained rural unit; but for all its charm rather too far from Franche for convenience.

After this period of market research Michael finally settled on, and bought, Chilton Estate. Chilton was a relaxed and comfortable house, originally consisting of two partly stone built cottages; early in the nineteenth century it had been converted into a gentleman's residence by the addition of a new front wing; and this evolution gave it a pleasantly ambulating, undulatory sort of layout, with a good collection of attic bedrooms for the young, it also had a sizeable farm.

The sitting room commanded a pleasant view running down to the river across the fields, there was a small garden, a windmill to pump the water, coach houses, dog kennels and a fine introductory avenue of trees, planted by Michael and Annie lined the drive. It was a good buy, land was then cheap, and even in 1925 1000 acres thereabouts was sold for £25,000.

In 1906 Annie notes in her Chilton diary, "after tea Michael and I went out to inspect the pegs just put in the drive field, where the light railway will run quite close to the house". So as to help with Annie's administrative problems Michael had come to an agreement with the railway company, and a condition of the Railway's passage through the grounds of Chilton was that the train would stop to pick up or set down passengers and their luggage on request. Latterly, partly for reasons of convenience, because the railway ran right to it, Chilton in Annie's estimation superceded all the other country properties. It had many interests for her, she seems to have done well with wild blackberries there, with Pattie she would sometimes pick 20 lbs. in a day. Annie also I liked gathering mushrooms, Chilton had a plentiful supply of wild ones, and Annie knew where to look for them. Mushrooming was known in the family as Annie's special sport, and the youngest children would enjoy going with her to help "spot the game".

As well as being their country home it lay in the middle of a good shoot; on October 2nd, 1903, in Foreman's dingle five guns got 81 pheasants and 12 partridges, but it also made on excellent base for the surrounding sporting land at Bickley, Chorley, Neen Sollars, Marlbrook, Gaudywood, Bagginswood, Prescott, etc. For Michael, who besides the Kidderminster benches also sat for Shropshire, the nearness of Cleobury Mortimer Courthouse was an added bonus. Chilton was close enough to Franche for the young to walk over there, and certainly within easy bicycling or horse-riding distance, which was so important before the railway came.

The fishing at Chilton on the river Rea was a particularly lovely stretch of water, and they often supped or breakfasted off freshly caught trout. The Rea is a delightful little fast flowing stream, rising in the Clee Hills, which joins with the Teme at Newnham Bridge. The Teme goes on to join the Severn down beyond Worcester. The rolling country of that part of Shropshire is dominated by the soft outlines of those Clee Hills, so isolated that it is a local jest that they are the last mountains, before the Urals.

While in the deep pools of the river Rea, the brown trout running up to about 2 lbs, must have been caught from the bank with a worm for centuries; most of the Rea is shallow enough for an angler to wade up stream casting his fly in front of him. To avoid the overhanging trees and drop a fly so lightly that it looks quite natural, in just the right position for a fish to take it on the surface of the water, is a skilful operation, the excitement when the fly lands just right for a rising fish is considerable. In Michael's time the angler used a wet or sunken fly, a greenheart or cane rod about 10 feet long, a line treated to float. Joined at the end of the line was a cast; this was a fine transparent filament said to have been made from the gut of a cat, knotted in short lengths, and attached by the fisherman to the wire eye of the fly of his choice, which was equipped with a small barbed hook for the consumption of the trout. Naturally, the overhanging branches of trees are festooned in the flies and casts of the inexperienced, but these branches are a necessary part of the biological cycle.

The children were deeply interested in the wild life of the district, and one afternoon they had spent looking at birds they "got drenched and came back for a good meal of ham and eggs"; but their elders who had considered it too wet for going out at all, stayed in and played poker all the afternoon; slightly one suspects to Annie's disapproval.

Chilton was their favourite place, and it remained in family ownership for about 80 years.

The family philosophy with sports and games was, it isn't the winning or the size of the bag that matters, but the friendship and enthusiasm, the jokes and stories of the company. On a winter's day the finely etched frost coated tracery of the twigs against the sky, on a summer's day the sound of the stream, and the marvellous colours of the kingfisher as it flashes by on the afternoon you don't catch a fish at all. The jest of your partner when you lose a set of tennis, the greenness of the grass on the Worcester County Cricket ground with the river and the Cathedral behind, the feeling of exhilaration when you get the timing just right and the ball streaks off your bat to the boundary.

The fun of urging your bike over the last rise to complete the long free wheel on the road to Mamble; the romantic moon on the river Severn as you shoot the rapids on the way home to Bewdley; a red squirrel running along a branch, a cock pheasant in all its colours strutting across a field on a summer's day. Its wonderful to come back in the evening so tired you can hardly make the last mile home, yet at peace with the world and with a grand appetite for supper.

## Chapter 11

### Some Travels

As Michael's business became established he began to travel extensively, at first he travelled entirely for business reasons, usually to promote exports, later he travelled for his own reasons, to see how other people lived, to see beautiful things, for pure curiosity, to learn from other cultures and technologies, and sometimes just for a holiday. Sometimes he took Annie with him, but she didn't really like being separated from her family and her home for too long, so he more often went alone. If Annie was going to leave home she preferred to go up to Wakefield; she would take a youngster or two with her, and they loved their visits to her old home; the older ones also enjoyed their uncle Frank Stonehouse who was a special favourite, and used to give them a treat discouraged in Kidderminster, of riotous evenings out at the local hostelry.

Annie often travelled to London with Michael and they often stayed with friends like the Baldwins who seem to have been very kind and hospitable to them. While in town they might visit an exhibition, a play, a meeting of a learned society, and while Michael visited his carpet customers with his London manager, Annie would with typical femininity search the shops for exotics more exciting than the Midlands could provide.

On a visit to London in 1884, in the evenings they went to three shows, the Sorcerer, Romeo and Juliet, and the Candidate.

During the day Michael worked at Tomkinson & Adam's office in Newgate Street in the shadow of St. Paul's Cathedral; the office was a tall narrow house, with a twisting iron staircase and a delightful speaking tube intercom which ran from floor to floor and down which a naughty child could pour soup or tea which came out the other end in a most satisfactory way. The basement was occupied with the stock of rugs and mats to give a quick delivery service to customers in the metropolitan area, the seamless squares were kept on the ground floor initially in a great stock which had to be turned over for the customers to view by dint of considerable muscular effort; later the squares were mounted on swinging arms which gave a much better display.



On the first floor (in the drawing room in the house's days of domestic life), was an elegant showroom for showing patterns to customers. On the upper floors were the administrative offices, the counting house, and a designers' studio.

On their way back from this trip to London they got off the train at Leamington Spa to stay the night with Michael's relations; Gertrude recalls the house; it was a lovely regency style white painted stucco fronted terrace building, reminiscent of the Nash terraces which overlook Regent's Park. In such tall narrow classical houses, with many stairs and floors, fifteen paned sash windows, a warren of bedrooms with small sanitation, lived comfortably, quietly and industriously - the middle classes. Behind these terrace houses stretched the usual long narrow garden, in which visiting children were turned out to play.

The next day they caught the train back to Kidderminster, where they were met at the station by their coachman with the landau. Franche Hall transport varied with the demand on it, but before motor cars took over the horse drawn vehicles were something like this; the landau, a gracious but fairly heavy four seater, possibly five or six little ones could squeeze in, a double drop head carriage drawn by two horses. Then there was the Brougham, a little four seater for smart occasions, often drawn by one horse; the pony carriage, carrying two in front and two strapped behind, which the family often drove themselves, drawn by one horse or pony; the dog cart, a maid of all work, which the boys used to use for their parties as they grew up. The wagonette, which would take up to eight, six faced each other three each side, and one sat beside the driver, was a most useful vehicle. Later as the family grew, came the most capacious vehicle of all, the bus, drawn by four horses, with a detachable top, which would hold twelve or more for cricket matches and family outings.

Another journey Annie and Michael used to make together was to Scotland, sometimes they would stay with their friends and competitors the Templeton family of Glasgow, they would then visit Knockderry and Dimfillan, go on the river steamer Sylvia to Duncreeff. They also used to stay with the Dyson Perrins at Ardrross Castle, near Alness. Michael enjoyed the grouse shooting and the late strawberries, but could never bear killing so lovely an animal as a deer.

Annie's furthest afield journey was the 1887 visit to U.S.A. when she accompanied Michael on business. As usual in her diary she tells us nothing of the trip, but she does note down her packing list: flannel dress, evening dress, thick white cream muslin, new stiff black low bodice, travel in green, take black lace, dressing gown, white jacket, Vaporisene, Eau de Cologne, writing case, biscuits, tea, macintosh, dust cloak, shawl, umbrella, sunshades and finally Laxative Senna! Michael frequently went to U.S.A. and Canada and besides John Sloane and Warren Smith he knew Halcyon Skinner, Mr. Shuttleworth of the Mohawk Carpet Company, the Hayes family of Toronto, Mr. Whittall and many others.

Another early foreign expedition seems to have been to Italy. Michael's wide interests enabled him to make these trips a useful combination of business and pleasure. Sometime before departure he would have advertised for or been recommended to some interested Italians to interview with a view to their appointment as his agent, if any of them proved suitable, the terms of the agency would be verbally agreed and the appointment made. The agent's job would be to present Tomkinson & Adam's lines to suitable outlets, obtain orders, ensure payment, and deal with problems and linguistic interpretation. T. & A. would provide the marketing materials, patterns and in return pay the agent about 5% commission on money received. While in Italy Michael would not only familiarise his agent with the best methods of presenting the range of carpets to the buyers, explain delivery methods, delivery times, prices, insurance, freight, the nature and advantages of the products and discuss designs and colours but if possible take some orders, and he seems to have been one of those salesmen who would never come back without a useful order.

He would also do a simple practical market research operation, to find out what carpet lines within the manufacturing potential of T & A were likely to be acceptable to the Italian market at a selling price covering costs and showing a reasonable return; perhaps special designs, colours and qualities were needed, if so would they sell in sufficient quantity to justify themselves? So customers would appreciate that he admired and tried to understand their beautiful country it was necessary for him whenever he had a spare moment, in the evenings and weekends, to study it. In fact, of course, he immensely enjoyed the glorious pictures, the superb sculptures and buildings and the exquisite books of Florence, Rome and Milan, and he took some excellent photographs.

A country Annie did enjoy visiting was France, perhaps partly because she spoke and read the language so well. Another Annie special was a family expedition twice made to the Yorkshire coastal resorts, arranged so that Annie could meet up with her family, and because she believed in the unique health properties of the Yorkshire air. For these two holidays Michael chartered a whole railway coach from Kidderminster, one year to Whitby, and the following year to Scarborough; the coach comprised a third class section for the staff travelling with them, a Pullman saloon for Michael and Annie, a nursery, a dining car and the usual offices; the children found it highly exciting, and enjoyed their days travelling enormously.

In 1896 Michael with a friend, probably Warren Smith, visited Naples, and then went on to Cairo visiting the Pyramids, museums and archeological sites, then up the Nile on a river boat taking some superb photographs of the antiquities; of all his lantern slides the Egyptian show had the best audience rating.

On his return from these journeys, when he had processed his plates, he used to give lantern lectures to his friends, to local societies, and to the public in the Town Hall to raise funds for the Kidderminster Infirmary. He had two huge and superbly made brass mounted mahogany slide projectors; when I knew them both were electrically lit, the longer range one had carbon arcs which required occasional adjustment, and the other which may have been converted from gas, had an enormous electric bulb, and they projected a magnificent picture. The glass slides for projection were all carefully labelled and preserved in the drawers of wooden boxes. Home made electric light was installed at Franche Hall in March 1893 so perhaps the Town Hall received it about the same time, giving a better picture more conveniently. The carpet manufactory had electric light installed in June 1893 and he showed his slides to his staff by electricity thereafter Michael took so many excellent pictures and accumulated so many slides that it seemed best for them to be given into custody of the Royal Photographic Society's historical section, who now have them, together with the lanterns.

## Chapter 12

### Community Work

Michael and Annie devoted a lot of their energy and ability to trying to play a useful part in the life of their local community. On the Kidderminster Council during the period 1872 - 1878 there were two electoral wards, North and South, and Michael was elected for South Ward in 1884 and 1887; after the electoral reorganisation in 1888 he represented Rowland Hill Ward and was frequently returned unopposed, from 1907 to 1919 he was a Borough Alderman.

Kidderminster town council operated under the Municipal Corporation Act of 1835, Councillors were elected to hold office for three years, every three years the councillors elect Aldermen to hold office for 6 years, and the Mayor is elected annually by the whole of the council; how much simpler it was then, one part time Town Clerk was all that Kidderminster needed.

Michael and Annie were Mayor and Mayoress of Kidderminster seven times, and being Mayoress was almost as big a job as being Mayor; their years were 1887, 1893, 1894, 1895, 1905, 1912 and 1913. In her community work Annie's modest preference was to keep it as much as possible to the personal level, for she had a warm and friendly way with people and hated speechmaking. As Mayoress her most publicised event was the great speech she made on the occasion of the extension to Brinton Park in 1906. It is said that as the official charged with the golden key to the park gates was slow in producing it at the critical moment a cheerful Irishman in the crowd shouted out, "*Come on Michael, you'll never get into heaven without your golden key.*", and it was some time before the laughter had died down sufficiently for Annie to complete the ceremony.

Michael was made a freeman of the borough in 1916, a deputy Lieutenant for the County of Worcestershire in 1899, High Sheriff in 1892, and was a member of the county council from its inception in 1888 until he died; Chairman of its finance committee and a county Alderman, a member of the old school board as a representative of the churchmen from 1887, a governor of the Girls High School and the Kidderminster Grammar School, an original governor of Birmingham University, Feoffee of Old Swinford hospital.

Justice of the Peace for the Borough of Kidderminster and for the counties of Worcestershire and Shropshire, a trustee of the Kidderminster School of Science and Art, and President of the Kidderminster Cricket Club on whose grounds his sons played so many matches and enjoyed such magnificent sport. Mr. Hall, the well known local historian, says that Michael purchased both the Aggborough football ground and the Chester Road Cricket ground, and passed them on for perpetuity at the purchase price.

Among the things which have lasted have been the work done in helping to collect the funds for, and laying the foundation stone of Kidderminster's excellent free library where Michael's portrait still hangs, and also as President of Franche Village Club for which he provided the original land, and two generations have followed in his footsteps. Franche Club has grown to be one of the most successful clubs in the district due to the dedicated and capable management which the local people have provided; it has frequently had to restrict membership because its popularity has exceeded its facilities, and the friendly atmosphere which pervades the club is perhaps one of the most rewarding memories Michael and Annie have left behind them.

Michael was also a director of the Kidderminster Building Society, President of the Liberal Association, President of the local Chamber of Commerce. Michael and George Grosvenor were original members of, and in 1883 Michael was Grand Master of, the Lord Hill Lodge of the Independent Order of Oddfellows Manchester Unity Friendly Society, and subsequently for many years the senior trustee. The Order was much concerned with looking after any of their members who had fallen on hard times, were sick or disabled and tried to help members get work; in 1886 Brother E. Brown walking from Hull to take a possible work opportunity in Bristol was given accommodation, food and £2 to help him on his way.

Michael was by no means always a model of behaviour, for example, in Kidderminster Council in 1885: *"Mr. Tomkinson said it was so customary for him to be ruled out of order by the Mayor that he was not surprised at the course which had been taken!"* His outspokenness sometimes made him highly unpopular, when Annie as Mayoress in 1888 was presenting the prizes to the successful students of the Kidderminster School of Art, Michael said: *"He felt there was a want of go about the students, he did not know whether the youth was degenerating but he felt it was bumptious and conceited and unless that was taken out of them they would make a sorry figure in life!"*

Michael and Annie loved to be hospitable and in 1888 they entertained 230 representatives of the registered Friendly Societies to a Banquet in the Town Hall; the Hall was all carpeted, the walls hung with tapestries, damask, curtains scalloped and fringed, and numerous flags were suspended across the Hall. The orchestra was rendered exceedingly attractive with a profusion of Chinese lanterns, greenhouse flowering plants, ferns and shrubs relieved with bannerets, shields and devices were exhibited about the room, the tables were adorned with flowers and nothing was omitted which would contribute to the comfort and delight of the guests. There was an overture on the organ, a string band, a soprano vocalist, the Glee Union gave several glees, wines, spirits, cigars and finally mulled port was served; then Mr. Grosvenor made a handsome speech saying that in the Mayoress they had a lady more than usually fitted to grace the position and assist her husband in all the hospitalities and public occasions of the official year. Another public occasion was the annual open garden in Franche Hall; once a year it was customary for the Kidderminster band to play in Franche Hall gardens, at the weekend, and the facilities were open to the public.

Michael was also Chairman of the Royal Axminster Association and played an important part on the Carpet Trade Committee which negotiated with the Carpet Weavers Union on wages and conditions; negotiations in which his natural diplomacy was particularly valuable.

Michael was also a member of the Board of Guardians for many years; and also took a particular interest in trying to help the problem characters, right up to the end of his life.

Whatever we do we have our critics, and amongst Michael's critics was a well known local family who thought him conceited and too big for his boots, they always referred to him as "the great I am", but curiously they got on quite well with Annie whose love of children broke down many barriers.

## Chapter 13

### The Education of the Children

Annie as a well educated woman herself believed devoutly and fervently that the finest thing a parent could do for the young was to give them the best education available, and this she set out to do. The care with which she investigated, planned and followed it through is typical of her thorough and logical approach to all she did.

Many of her daughters went to the Alice Ottley School at Worcester, Wakefield High School, or Wycombe Abbey, and then for University, Oxford or Cambridge. Her sons mostly started at Arden House preparatory school in Warwickshire, some went to Kidderminster Grammar School, and Eton, Winchester or Rugby; while those who were University bent, and they mostly were, went to Oxford or Cambridge. Wilfred, who was preparing for a Naval career, went to the Britannia. While they were at boarding school she wrote them, sent them food parcels and visited them. Academically none of them did other than adequately and several did extremely well; Herbert in his quiet thoughtful way got a good Scholarship to Winchester, and Raymond to Eton. At Oxford Gertrude was an excellent classical scholar, but was up before girls were allowed to take degrees. Dora followed her to Lady Margaret Hall and took her degree in History. Margaret with her enormous sense of fun undoubtedly brightened up Girton College where she got a good degree in Science.

The plans went astray once, Geoff and Martin were at Arden House together and were so naughty that they had to be separated and Martin sent elsewhere.

In the world of public school Cricket the family had a coincidence; Geoffrey was in the Winchester first eleven and Martin was in the Eton first eleven the same year, and so of course in the annual Eton v Winchester cricket match they played against each other; on another occasion in 1903 at Rugby football Geoffrey played for Cambridge University v Blackheath while Wilfred played for the Harlequins v Oxford University on the same day.

Geoffrey in his last year at Winchester was one of the most successful sportsmen in the school's history but is remembered for one less kind deed.

Perhaps Mr. Batham a Winchester Don of considerable interest and distinction, was one morning walking down Kingsgate Street during school working hours, imagine therefore his amazement when he heard the click of a racquets ball coming from the school racquets courts. Of course, it was Geoffrey practicing, a school prefect at the time, he was lucky to get off with being severely reprimanded by the headmaster. On another occasion he got up early one morning and drove a small herd of sheep which he had noticed grazing nearby into a classroom, so that when the class assembled for morning lines there was a considerable smell and quite a problem to be dealt with before work could begin. Fortunately for Geoffrey, whatever suspicions there may have been he was never officially identified as the shepherd, or he would have been sacked and lost his chances of passing into Cambridge.

Before his father would let him go up to Cambridge he made Geoffrey serve his time as an engineering apprentice at Platt Brothers of Oldham the great Textile Engineers who built T.& A's carpet looms. At Cambridge he took a degree in engineering, played for the University at cricket, rugger and soccer and won the Sculls and rowed in the trial eights.

A charming picture of Martin's quite classical relationship with his schoolmasters emerges from his Eton school reports:

1898 - He is an interesting boy, both in intellect and character. In Mathematics he does as little as possible and talks in school when he need not, otherwise is quiet. A cheerful fellow.

1899 - His handwriting is often almost illegible because of the great pace at which he tries to get through his work. A boy of considerable ability, his head is too full of cricket to make the most of himself. Always very pleasant and friendly and I have liked him very much, and another: an able boy to whom his work comes very easily, his thoughts have been far more devoted to his racquets and his football than his latin and greek. He is a very nice lad and I have liked him very much. Full share of common sense.

1900 - An able boy, and the best scholar amongst the Oppidans, if only he would interest himself more in his work, he might well combine such an interest with devotion to games, as it is I fear the latter is driving out the former. It is a pity, he is always nice in manner.



Finally 1901 - A clear headed and sensible boy who has worked well and improved. He ought to pass easily in June if cricket does not take up too much of his time next half.

They were quite right, Martin was a cheerful fellow, at school, in the office, in the trenches or at home he always had a happy way with him. He became solicitor to Mitchell and Butlers the Birmingham brewers, and there was always a fine barrel of M. & B's best beer on top in the cellar for the consumption of himself and his friends. He was no small man, and he had an exceptional capacity for enjoying beer in bulk, which never seemed to have much effect on him except to lubricate that part of his memory which produced such delightful stories.

## Chapter 14

### The France Hall Library

When great book collectors die their libraries are usually recirculated amongst those interested by a series of sales at Sothebys in London. Perhaps the greatest was that of Sir Thomas Phillips collection; he put together the largest collection of manuscripts and printed books ever accumulated by one man, and a fine story Dr. Munby the Librarian of King's College makes of it; Sir Thomas drove his poor wife out of house and home with his bibliomania. Fortunately, Michael wasn't quite as obsessed as Sir Thomas but the Franche Hall Library was a great book collection, and it took Sothebys nearly ten sales to disperse it, while quite a few of the books still remain in the family.

Michael had two book plates; at first he used a rather large and ornate coat of arms, later perhaps he felt this was too fussy so he adopted quite a neat and small cross of Lorraine reminiscent of Nicolas Jenson and St. John Hornby. His regular custom of sticking in his book plate identifies books which formed part of Franche Hall Library and a knowledge of its provenance adds so greatly to a book's interest.

Gertrude acted as family librarian, unpacking Michael's purchases, very carefully and eruditely cataloguing them, shelving them, putting in Michael's book plates, and explaining their special points of interest to visitors and to her own family.

There were two libraries, one full of the books for current reading, to which all the family were encouraged to have access; and the other containing the great works of art for the delectation of students and connoisseurs.

Michael and Annie possessed a considerable collection of fine mediaeval manuscripts including a really magnificent ninth century codex on vellum, very superbly written in bold Roman half unicals. There was also an enormous and fascinating collection of letters written by such interesting people as, George Washington, Louis XIV, Charles II, Prince Rupert, Charlotte Bronte, Dickens, Tennyson, Pepys, Voltaire, Madame de Maintenon, William Penn and many others.

An interesting early printed book was Cicero's *Eposolae ad familiares*, on vellum in an edition of 100 copies by John de Spiro in 1468/9. This was specially interesting because it was the first issue of the first book ever printed with moveable type in that great centre of the early printing industry, Venice, and de Spiro was clear, readable and quite elegant. The British Museum has George III's copy of this book and as he was one of the most literate of English Monarchs, Franche Hall was in good company.

Another beautiful book of theirs was their Florence Homer an editio princeps printed by Nerlius in fine greek characters in 1488.

William Morris's contribution to the revitalisation of furnishings gradually influenced carpet design trends and interested Michael so much that he collected a fine set of the Kelmscott Press books including the great Chaucer, perhaps the most glorious product of the revival of printing. John Ruskin and his concept of the nature of mediaeval achievement was another of Michael's interests, and so an edition of his works was especially bound for the library. Peter Schoeffer, one of Gutenberg's direct heirs and one of the earliest colour printers was represented by an elegant edition of Justinian of 1476. They possessed several Caxtons; he was, of course, the first man, probably in 1477, to print with moveable types in England, and because of his greatness as an innovator his work now fetches a high price. Included in Sotheby's sale of the Franche library was a copy of the *Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer, printed by William Caxton at Westminster in 1484, and in 1922 it fetched ninety four pounds. It was probably the same copy which was sold by Sotheby's on June 14th, 1965 for Thirty Thousand pounds.

One of Michael and Annie's best friends were the Dyson Perrins' of Davenham, Malvern; while the Perrin family are better known to the world at large for the taste of their famous Worcester Sauce, Mr. C.W. Dyson Perrins was a great collector and connoisseur of early books and manuscripts, and a contributor to our knowledge of incunabula. To further these bookish discussions it was common for Annie and Michael to dine and sleep at Davenham and the hospitality was often reciprocated. The Dyson Perrins library was not broken up until the nineteen sixties when it fetched some million pounds, the Franche Hall library, sold in 1922 at a time of depressed book values, fetched only a little over £5,000. These two collectors often interchanged books and the story goes that Mr. Dyson Perrins had a lovely motor car, a Delaunay Melville, which Michael fancied, and finally a deal was agreed - Michael swapped a Caxton for the motor car, which at that time may have been a good deal'

Michael's first folio of Shakespeare, of which the family were particularly proud, was one of the treasures most admired by students and other visitors to his library.

Annie notes her husband's attendance in 1912 at the dinner of the Roxburghe Club. It was the practical prototype of the true book club; instituted on June 7th, 1813 in commemoration of the sale of the Duke of Roxburghe library, and perhaps more especially in honour of the Voldarfer Boccaccio. At first the club was largely convivial, and its dinners sometimes cost five to six pounds a head, but the special feature of the club was that each member in turn produced some volume, a facsimile of a rare work, at his own expense, in a limited edition, one for each of the club members with a few over, a volume each year, the Chairman's copy to be on vellum, and the club became famous for the high standard of its publications. When Michael's turn came to contribute a book he took a lot of trouble to come out with a finely produced edition of the Melville book of Roundels, of which he owned the original. This was No. 1664 in the Franche Hall book sale:

*Melwill (David) Ane Buik of roundells. Whairin thair is conteined songs and roundels that may be sung with thrie, four fyue or mo voices haifing prettie and pleasantt lettere sum in Latin and sum in English, quhilks or an hundreth in number. Collected and notted by david meluill 1612.*

MS on paper 76 leaves written in a book hand with musical notes, etc.

Michael's Roxburghe Society facsimile had been so much admired that in 1972 a well known bookseller offered a copy for sale in his catalogue for £110, whereas in the 1922 Franche Library sale the original manuscript from which it was derived fetched only £51.

A library like Franche Hall's has a subtle effect on the young; they automatically absorb something from it, and if they spend a lot of time helping to catalogue it, as certainly Gertrude very efficiently did, they learn the practical use of their Latin and Greek, and the philosophies in which the ancients believed. Thus they go to school with a cultural heritage which they never entirely forget.

## Chapter 15

### The Japanese Collection

The Japanese having shut themselves off from foreign influence for 216 years, were rudely awakened from their dream of peace by Commodore Perry's squadron of United States warships in 1853. From the frightened Shogun he extracted a treaty, and the country was reopened to foreign commerce and influence. This new influx accelerated the decline of feudalism, the end of Shogunate, and the Meiji restoration of the power of the Emperor in 1868.

Very great changes both hierarchical and economic accompanied the developments of 1853 and 1868. In particular the developing social structure led to many of the noble class of the Samurai becoming impoverished, due to new commercial influences gaining wealth and power. The day of the Samurai sword as part of an aristocrat's normal way of life gradually ceased, after an edict of 1877 ordering the two million members of the military class to abandon their prerogative of wearing two swords; in future swords were only for policemen and those who became soldiers in uniform. This edict and the impoverishment of so many of the old upper classes led to the sale of many of their works of art and family heirlooms; it was thus a particularly opportune time to start a collection of pieces of first class quality representative of the great artistic tradition of Japan, which might otherwise have become lost to humanity. Many fine works of art were coming on the market just at the time when Michael and Annie were starting to build up their collection, whether this was the cause, or a fortunate accident is obscure, but it certainly enabled the Franche Hall compilation to be advantageously assembled with regard to both quality and price.

Michael's Japanese collection was started in 1878, only 25 years after the opening of Japan to the west and 10 years after the Meiji restoration; the collection originated in a few really fine objects, and although it ultimately contained several thousand items, its standard of excellence was rigorously maintained. Writing about his collection Michael says: *"the Japanese were more nearly a nation of artists, than any the world has ever seen if we except the Greeks. The refined taste of the educated Japanese kept alive the old traditions, its matchless lacquer, its beautiful enamels, its marvellous metalwork."*

*Should the catalogue of this collection lead to the increased study of the arts of Japan by my own countrymen, and induce a further application of them to our manufacturing industries, the labour of the compiler will not have been in vain".*

There is quite a collection of articles and small books written by Michael at this period on the arts of Japan, and he also gave numerous lectures. Michael and Annie were perfectionists in Art, and in Japanese art they found a degree of perfection in detail of craftsmanship not often found elsewhere, and they derived much satisfaction from it.

If Annie and Michael's greatest pride was their family, perhaps the Japanese collection came next; many of the guests to Franche Hall at this time were pilgrims to the collection; Princes, nobility, Ambassadors, Professors, family friends, dealers, experts, and many ordinary lovers of beautiful craftsmanship.

Michael and Annie employed or did business with a number of experts and dealers in Japanese objects d'art, one of these who became a particular family friend was Mr. G. Kowaki, who paid seven visits to Franche in 1892. He became so much a member of the family that Annie enrolled him in her blackberrying team; because of Mr. Ko's loss of face when he once accidentally upset the basket at a stile, everyone was so sorry for him that it caused a major family mourning! He was a modest and charming expert, and in the exhibition of Japanese lacquer and metal work that the Burlington Fine Arts Club put on in 1894, the preface to the catalogue records the invaluable aid of Mr. Kowaki in its compilation, and in the revision of its introduction. Michael was a member of the club and lent from his collection fifty five of the items exhibited.

In June 1898 Michael and Annie published the catalogue of their Japanese collection, in two fine large vellum bound quarto volumes with Hackers great portrait of Michael as its frontispiece. To give an idea of the collection these were the main items listed; in the first volume:

1,087 Inros of which 190 are illustrated; inros are small compartmented boxes used for carrying such articles as seals or medicines, they are commonly made of wood, lacquered with superb skill, and date mainly from the 18th and 19th centuries; throughout the catalogue the signatures of the artist-craftsmen are identified wherever possible.

1,018 Netsuke mainly of ivory or wood; netsukes were ornamental toggles or buttons used to prevent the cord, from which were suspended such objects as inros or keys, from slipping through the belt or sash.

650 Tsuba or sword guards of metal decorated with chiseled "engravings" illustrating such objects as plants and animals, and often signed.

469 Decorated metal knife and sword handles, 167 swords with their unique blades and their renowned workmanship, 277 ivories with carved, almost sculptured figures in the form of bowls, screens, cabinets, boxes, cups, and daggers with 22 illustrations, 71 cloisonne enamels, 72 tobacco pouches and other pieces of smoking equipment, and 78 embroideries, robes and brocades.

The second volume opens with two plates of the interior of the Japanese gallery at Franche Hall which held the show cases containing the collection, and then includes:-

700 examples of lacquer, mainly used in decoration of wood panels, bowls, and boxes, often encrusted with metalwork of the 17th and 19th centuries with 25 illustrations.

278 metal vases, trays suits of armour and boxes, of alloys, of copper, iron, gold, tin, lead, with 12 illustrations; collections of coins, arrowheads, beads and clasps; 364 ceramic items pottery, porcelain, and satsuma faience, paintings, scrolls and albums of drawings.

Throughout the catalogue there is an article on each subject, the whole work is indexed in limited edition of 200 copies.

Interchanges of views and knowledge about the Japanese world of art were fertilised by the meetings of the Japan Society whose annual dinners commenced in 1892, under the presidency of H.E. the Japanese Minister; as well as Annie, Michael who was a council member often took Pattie and friends such as the Grosvenors to eat the 12 course dinner provided. The Japanese collection also rubbed off on the children, encouraging them in high standards of craftsmanship and in an appreciation of other cultures than their own.

## Chapter 16

### The Children up to the War

The careers of Annie's children up to 1957 are fully documented in "Those Damned Tomkinsons" by Sir Geoffrey Tomkinson, published by Cheshires of Kidderminster in 1950 with a supplement in 1957. This little informal chapter only tries to show how a mother bursting with pride over her young may have seen them.

Gertrude the eldest, know as Trottie from the way she walked, was a walking encyclopaedia of anything to do with "Arts", but anyone less scientific it would be hard to imagine, her car driving was distinctly picturesque. She was once driving her Standard car along the narrow high hedged lane to Chilton, and met another car driven by another lady nose to nose. To their mutual dismay it transpired that neither knew how to reverse, so they philosophically waited until another more knowledgeable motorist came along and helped them.

In 1912 Gertrude married a clergyman Alban Daughlish, it was an interesting wedding, no-one knows if it was ever consummated, certainly there were no children because Gertrude's passion was travel, she circumnavigated the globe as often as she could afford to. Her husband was not interested in travel, he was a devout, stocky, retiring, pauciloquacious Harrovian, extremely knowledgeable about and keen on cricket, with a deep love for the poet Dante, to whom latterly the affairs of the Church took second place. While he was in charge of the parish of Rowley Regis he made many friends, rebuilt the church when it was burnt down, and acted as family hotel when the Tomkinsons got stranded on their way back from Birmingham. From Rowley the Daughlishes came by a wonderful servant, Mary Poole, who devoted her life to them from 1912 until Gertrude's decease in 1964. This was just as well for them as Gertrude could write a verse in Latin or Greek far better than she could boil an egg or make a bed, as her nephews found out many years later when help was hard to get and Mary got her well deserved holidays.



Gertrude was once passed by one of her very many platonic boy friends in his car as she was walking down to Kidderminster station; the gentleman politely stopped, offered her a lift in his car, and asked her to where she was carrying her suitcase. "To Timbuktu", she replied, and indeed she was. She survived many hair raising adventures on her travels, this time her bus broke down in the middle of the desert and there were two thirsty days before they were rescued. Annie's diary has one brief comment on Gertrude's wedding: "Van takes Gertrude's belongings to Rowley Regis, we forgot to send the wedding cake."

Herbert and Gerald both came into the carpet business from school. They greatly assisted Michael as he got older, but Michael stayed boss until the end. The respect in which he was held was a great help in keeping the peace between the younger generations of the two families. Herbert's wisdom enabled him to follow his father in the general direction of the firm, while Gerald was an engineer operating on the production end of the business, and in developing the broad Axminster loom.

For Annie perhaps Wilfred always had a special romance, a dream of great battleships showered in spray cleaving their way through mountainous seas, did he also remind her of her father's seafaring days? Wilfred joined the Royal Navy in 1891, he often came to Franche for his leaves and sometimes brought his friend Sir Roger Keyes. In 1898 Annie was anxious about Wilfred because of a report in the Times from Wei-hei-wei when he was serving in the Hart: *"Her Majesty's battleship Centurion left here suddenly under scaled orders, it is supposed that her destination is Ta-ku. She will be accompanied from Chifu by Her Majesty's ships... Hart and Alacrity... the situation is considered very grave... railway communication between Tien-tsin and Peking is interrupted.... alarming reports are current regarding the situation in the Chinese capital"*; but Wilfred survived far greater dangers than this.

The background to Wilfred's naval career was one of exciting development. The first warship in the navy with a modern appearance, the Devastation was launched in 1873, whereas her predecessors had been fully rigged, the Devastation had two turrets, with her funnels and functional mast placed in the middle between them. In 1881 the navy's largest ship was the 11,880 ton Inflexible and her 80 ton muzzle loading guns threw an 1,800 lb. shell propelled with black powder; she had two masts with yards to carry sails. In 1886 the Admiral class, more costly than their predecessors, of steel with armour plates, had breech loading guns.

Battleships not only became more expensive, the Royal Sovereign of 1892 cost over a million pounds, but quicker obsolescence made the retention of naval supremacy extremely costly. From 1893 destroyers were developed, and Wilfred had a lot to do with them. The first submarines were ordered in 1900, and it was in a gallant attempt to save the life of A. B. Ball washed overboard from a submarine in a heavy sea that in 1913 Wilfred won the Stanhope gold medal for the bravest deed of the year, and naturally Annie was exceedingly proud of him. It was about 1909 that the British government began to get seriously worried about Turpitz's German navy and the Admiralty asked for six new dreadnoughts per year, and it was the resultant 18 ships which helped Jellicoe in 1914 to bottle up the German main fleet.

Marion, one of the loveliest of Annie's children, the most musical and artistic member of the family, never got on exceedingly well with her father. She had no professional qualifications and only later succeeded in living her own life and earning her own income. Marion received the same allowance as her other sisters, £52 per year, a not ungenerous sum for a middle class family of that era. From this she had to pay for her clothes, travelling, personal expenses, etc. Her sisters, who all qualified in their own spheres, were all able to supplement their income more easily and go their own ways. All had the option of living free at Franche Hall provided they conformed to the family way of life, which Marion found hard to do.

Raymond became the headmaster of a successful preparatory school near Oxford, the University of his graduation, and he often used to have his parents, brothers and sisters over for the school events.

Geoffrey with a Cambridge Engineering degree and £500 was packed off to Brazil in 1905 as a constructional engineer with the Great Western of Brazil Railway, and by 1914 had been responsible for the building of several hundred miles of line, much of it through virgin country. It was a natural custom for the Railway company's constructional engineers to place the actual physical building work with Brazilian contractors, and when a tunnel was to be built the contractor would be paid so many Cruzieros per cubic metre excavated. It was a single line metre gauge railway, but if the engineer should accidentally miscalculate, and the tunnel having been started from both ends at once the two excavations should never meet, then the contractor would get paid for two tunnels, and an unscrupulous engineer might receive a rake off, it was hard for the mainly London based directors to pin it down; should corruption and waste occur far away in the backwoods of Brazil.

Geoffrey, given the job of tightening up on costs had an exciting time, twice the contractors hired bandits to bump him off, but he hadn't been in the shooting eight at Winchester for nothing, he survived, thrived on it, made many friends amongst the Brazilians, learnt to speak the language fluently, and married the local banker's daughter.

Martin, after leaving Eton, qualified as a Solicitor, becoming a partner in the law firm of Evershed & Tomkinson in Birmingham and lived at Franche until Michael's decease. His devotion to family affairs, his delightful sense of humour and the simple life he led made him perhaps the most loved member of the family by the family.

Dora, a gifted teacher and an excellent games player, taught at Wycombe Abbey School, spending much of her holidays at Franche.

Margaret after doing well at school and college, during the war worked at the Kidderminster Infirmary, then at Marion's V.A.D. Hospital in the Larches, Kidderminster. Subsequently she put in 3 years war work as a metallurgical chemist. After the war she returned to Cambridge as a research student and then as a lecturer in chemistry, and was awarded a fellowship. Later she became Professor of Chemistry at the University of Toulouse in France. This was quite a fine tribute to a foreigner. Margaret had a wonderful joie de vivre, which made her many friends and was a great source of sparkle and optimism to her mother in her old age.

The twins, the two youngest of the family- Charles and Christine - were both exactly 21 years old when war was declared. Charles got a commission in the East African Rifles and campaigned under the great General Jan Smuts; while Christine went through the whole training of a S. R. N. at St. Thomas' Hospital in London, where she was awarded the Florence Nightingale Gold Medal.

## Chapter 17

### The Family and the War

1914

While the clouds of war were gathering life at Franche went on as usual; as with most who live to a good age there were a lot of friends' funerals for Michael and Annie to attend. First came the loss of their Japanese Art adviser, purchasing agent, and friend; the minature, energy packed, red haired, red bearded, Captain Sparkes; and then Mr. Edward Morton's funeral, "*Bertie and Gerald come and Stanley Baldwin lunched here to also go*".

Although Michael was 73, they still enjoyed a good party, and had 14 of the Worcestershire Yeomanry, Herbert's Cavalry Regiment, to dinner, to warm them up for the Yeomanry Ball that followed; then they gave a tea party for 30 children from Franche School; and as usual Annie enjoyed the snowdrops in the early spring at High Habberley. They had some health problems, Michael had to have his leg lanced, and wasn't allowed to walk in his Japanese gallery, and Annie had a bad fall and had to use a wheel chair for a while. Michael still did his share of community work and several times Annie noted how late back he was from the bench; and they attended the usual functions such as the fire brigade dinner. Gradually the country became geared up for war, the Territorial Army were mobilised, Bertie and Martin with them; Geoffrey forsook his career in Brazil and dashed home to join up. Meg worked in the infirmary and learnt nursing the hard way, the staff gave her a good rough time and put her in charge of the mortuary.

**1915**

1915 was a special year for Annie because her eldest son was married; Herbert married Phyllis Cornish in Egypt where he was a Major on Field Marshall Allenby's Staff. Miss Cornish, an artist of no mean ability herself, was a relation of Homo Thornycroft one of the greatest sculptors of the late Victorian era, and of Ingram Bywater, Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford, and granddaughter of John I. Thornycroft the great builder of destroyers for the navy.

Two of Annie's daughters who had nursing training became responsible for local emergency hospitals; Marie ran the Larches emergency hospital, and her walking patients often came to tea, some times forty or fifty at a time, to Franche Hall where they enjoyed the summer sun sitting in the gardens. At the end of the year, Geoffrey was twice wounded in France on the western front and sent home to mend.

## 1916

The War bit, deeper and many friends and acquaintances were killed, others wounded or taken prisoner; at the beginning of February they got really close to the fighting, "*Zeppelin raid last night, the machines passed over here*", notes Annie. The news was full of events: Naval engagement off Jutland, battle of Hoen Reef, then the Hampshire was torpedoed and all on board including the great Kitchener were lost; while at home Michael and Gerald helped to turn the carpet business over to making blankets for the forces.

Opposite Franche Hall, the Percy Leas moved into the Beeches house; Percy was a loyal and dedicated director of the Kidderminster Gas Company, and to the end of his long life remained faithful to gas lighting in his home after electric had become the normal usage. On Annie's staff she gained a friend in Siddons. Siddons, the Franche Hall parlour maid, was a very imposing, tall, ascetic, stately, yet kind hearted mainstay of Annie's last years, and a few days before Annie died, she had an electric bell fixed beside her to ring to Siddons' room for help should it be needed in the night.

## 1917

Of all wars, this one probably had more casualties, and less to show for them, than any other. As the German submarine sinkings, built up, food rationing was introduced in earnest. In a delightfully pompous ceremony on the Town Hall steps the Mayor read out the Royal Proclamation on rationing and food supplies. Flour was already rationed and Annie carefully calculated that Franche Hall's consumption was well under the legal ration. Petrol for the Delaunay with its lovely silver plated box shaped oil lamps on either side of the windscreen, and its rather dashing cylinder shaped headlamps, its high straight windscreen, and its capacious five seater back, became a problem. Michael concentrated on trying to get exports and had a flow of Swedish customers to Franche Hall, and he received the honour of the Freedom of the Borough of Kidderminster from his fellow citizens.

Dora became the equivalent of chief personnel officer at the ministry of Munitions; Margaret worked at Stewarts and Lloyds on the chemistry of metals, and she also found time for a certain Captain Sykes, who gallantly gave her his signet ring. He was not only a frequent visitor to Franche but also took Margaret to see his mother, and finally Annie noted, "Le Fiancailles de Margaret", but the sprightly young lady survived numerous proposals of marriage and remained a gay bachelor girl into her eighties. Several gentlemen are said to have proposed to both Margaret and Christine, in the words of the old song, "*Till I kissed her little sister*", etc.

*"Munition factories blow up, jackdaws obstruct Franche Hall chimneys, Martin receives a D.S.O. and Bar, and Geoffrey the Military Cross; Annie unable to get foodstuffs for her chickens walks up Habberley Valley and buys eggs off the Osbornes", the oldest family in the Valley, who come there in 1896. Finally, she recounted a story: "A sportsman's capture, Monsieur Boiteux, when out shooting pheasants at Darnmartin, Franel in France, covered the German Commander of a Zeppelin in distress with his shot gun, preventing his destroying it, and was thus able to capture the Zeppelin intact. "*

## 1918

The year started with an event that delighted Annie, a bit of one upmanship on those Tomkinsons; her brother Ned was knighted Sir Edmund Stonehouse in the New Year's Honours List. All the available members of the family had a great celebration party in London at Princes and followed it up with a play. Sadly the happiness didn't last long for her nephew Ronald Stonehouse was shortly afterwards killed; and then further rationing was introduced to make her administration more difficult, meat, butter, and margarine all came on ration cards. The German army launched a final offensive on the western front to try and break through the exhausted allied lines before the Americans arrive in force, and only the exhaustion of his own troops prevented Ludendorff breaking through in his last attack. Geoffrey, a Colonel in the Royal Engineers, was given the job with 100,000 men of quickly constructing a reserve defence line, which fortunately was never used. Martin commanded a brigade in Italy on the beautiful Asiago plateau at the foot of the Dolomites. Wilfred who commanded the destroyer flotillas of the Dover Patrol had the most distinguished service career in the family.

They were mentioned in despatches several times and received so many decorations that some of them would hardly have been improperly dressed if they had worn nothing else. Wilfred received a Croix de Guerre and a C.B.; Bertie rather picturesquely the Order of the Nile; Marie an O.B.E. for her V.A.D. hospital, and, finally, of course, the year closed with peace.

They certainly celebrated the Armistice, all the cannons outside the front door at Franche were fired off by Gerald, they had a colossal bonfire, a party for all who cared to come with such refreshment as rationing permitted, flags flying, much rejoicing, dancing, singing and making merry. Michael even preached two sermons in one day in two separate churches owing to the shortage of priests.

## **1919**

How joyful they were with their victory and their peace celebrations, they were so elated, they possessed the German battleships, cruisers, torpedo boats and submarines and the Union Jack flew over them all; how quickly the change had come and England was covered with glory. There was a county peace parade at the Shirehall in Worcester, Michael and Annie, sister Emily, daughter Meg, Bertie's wife Phyl, they all went and had a good view of their own three soldiers in the parade, the reaction, relief, the rejoicing after those long wearisome years when it looked as though the war would never end.

Every church and chapel had its own peace treaty service; the 7th Battalion the Worcestershire Regiment, led by Martin, ceremonially took their colours back from the Parish Church of Kidderminster to their Battalion headquarters; all the houses on the route were decked out with the flags of the allies and the Union Jack; the streets were all adorned with bunting, banners, streamers and shields.

For many it was the end of a period of regular routine and regular employment and they had to face up to starting a new life. One such was Marie, she had probably never been happier in her life than using her natural qualities of leadership to help to alleviate the sufferings of the wounded; sublimating her maternal instincts, helping the disabled and those in need, outwitting the patients who felt they were fit enough to slip over the road to the pub by the Larches and get boozed up when they thought she wasn't looking.

With her fine profile and her superb colouring, looking fabulously stunning in her red Commandant's uniform, more desired, more admired, by more in one day than in her whole previous lifetime, and now it was all over, and her hospital was closed.



## Chapter 18

### The Last Chapter

Little has been said about the relationship between Michael and Annie. Michael of course was a superb showman, full of ability, energy, intelligence and charm, a foil to Annie's deep, quiet, modest, retiring personality, her strength lay in her organising ability, her love of her family, her warmth of character, her very strong sense of self discipline of right and wrong, her belief in education; the ethical basis of her life, her belief in truth and Christianity.

As far as is known their devotion to their marriage vows was complete, their faithfulness to each other seems to have been as absolute as was normal for the Victorian era; now we would ask was this due to Annie being an artist in bed? Certainly to produce 13 children indicates that it was no platonic marriage. Of course, Michael had enough activities in his many sports, services and his work to occupy his energies and sublimate his desires, but in our time such an interesting man might well have enjoyed several fabulous mistresses, but in his era a religious man would consider it wrong, and sex wasn't such an obsession as it is now; certainly in all the documents and memories available to me, there is no rumour even of extra-marital liaison. The pictures of her show Annie to have been a very attractive woman, always exquisitely turned out, the reports tell of a fascinating, witty, intelligent, sympathetic and interesting personality, so why should a man as wise as Michael have risked their relationship by looking elsewhere.

Whenever we go into a house we automatically sum up the way of life, the personalities, the culture and the tastes of the owners by what we see, so let us walk into Franche Hall.

As you came through the main hall the floor was carpeted with fine Oriental rugs, the great hall fireplace was protected by a wrought iron fireguard, and its top was upholstered and covered in leather for visitors to sit and warm themselves in the winter days before central heating. The hall, stairs and stairwell were partly panelled with stained and polished oak, with the doors to match, having brass mounted ebony handles and key hole covers. In the library the chairs were stuffed with horsehair and upholstered in persian saddlebacks in a richly patterned design; both in the hall and the library was a little octagonal topped 8 legged Indian table inlaid with ivory.

The numerous paintings were originals of the Victorian era, mainly by those artists they knew such as Birkit Foster, David Cox, Arthur Hacker, Burne Jones, Whistler and Poynter. The drawing room had French style pale green painted wood panelled walls, a mantelpiece of inlaid hand painted carved satinwood, with an overmantle of five bevelled mirrors. There was a semi grand piano, two tulipwood inlaid cabinets, marqueterie and buhl commodes, four silver gilt lamps stood nine feet high on their alabaster bases. The chairs were upholstered in a delicate salmon coloured figured silk tapestry matching the two settees; the display cabinets held a collection of Oriental ceramics, Royal Worcester porcelain, Crown Derby, Minton Spode, some Waterford and Venetian glass on the background of a green ground close fitted Axminster carpet.

The dining room had two large dining tables, which could be used together for large parties; the carpet, thirty seven feet long by fifteen feet wide was a floral, coloured in rich blue and greens. On the mantelpiece stood a 24 inch high striking clock with Westminster chimes in a marble and bronzed case. The sideboard was of massive carved oak with a bevelled mirror above, the curtains of figured tapestry; the dining chairs of oak upholstered in leather covered horsehair.

Annie's personal writing room had a brass rail fire kerb, a marqueterie circular topped pedestal table, a standard lamp, a fine walnut davenport writing desk, a card table, a blue ground Axminster carpet; the chairs were oak framed and upholstered in crimson velvet, and she had a Singer hand sewing machine which she used herself with satisfaction and some skill.

Michael's study had a large American oak roll top desk, a Georgian mahogany writing table, a black Wedgwood bust of Shakespeare; several large bronzes, oak bookcases, a carved mahogany arm chair with a tapestry seat and a blue ground Axminster carpet.

There was a special small chest of drawers for smoking equipment, candles, pipes and particularly a selection of different types of cigars from which his guests could select their choice. He also stored his photographic equipment, a Watson 8" x 6" plate camera with a Zeiss 16½inch convertible anastigmat lens, a Watkins exposure meter, and of course his 41 cases of slides and his photograph album.

In their Gazebo they kept the flags, large bunting, a Union Jack, a White Ensign, and a Stars and Stripes to welcome American customers; there was a fine flag pole and they liked to run up a flag on any excuse, for a bit of fun. The lawns were mown by a 34" mower pulled by a pony which used to have special comfortable big flat bottomed leather shoes strapped on to his feet, so that his metal shoes shouldn't mark the turf. Finally, in Franche Hall upstairs were 14 bedrooms and two nurseries.

At Tomkinson and Adam if the head was getting old, there were new young men coming up in the business, and the young George Cartwright was to become an Axminster engineer in the tradition of Halcyon Skinner and William Adam. George Cartwright's son tells the story of two men off the firm sent up to Franche Hall to do repair work on the stables; Annie disturbed at their slow progress asked Michael to tackle them about it. They confidently assured him of the complications, immensity and difficulties of the job and that not a moment had been wasted. Next Monday when Michael went to work, after spending some of the weekend with his photographic equipment in his dark room, he bore with him a print of the two workmen hiding behind a hedge and having a really nice smoke, which he passed around to the amusement of all. George Cartwright himself, besides his delightful sense of fun and irrepressible love of practical jokes, was also a courageous man; the flagpole at Franche was not a swing down but a fixed upright, so when the cord broke and the wheel at the top had to be rethreaded, George volunteered to climb up it and put it right, which he skilfully did 100 feet above the rose garden one glorious spring evening before an admiring audience.

When in September 1919 Tomkinson and Adam celebrated their jubilee of fifty years of carpet making, Annie and Michael entertained 1,000 out of some 1,600 in Michael's word, "Fellow workers", to tea in a great marquee in the gardens of Franche Hall. His fellow workers presented him with a silver salver as an expression of the great esteem in which he was held by them all.

Speaking in reply, Michael said that as a boy of 13 he had been interested in the carpet trade and due to the kindness of Lea and Simcox was able to give a weaver named Bythway threepence to teach him how to weave on a hand loom in the school holidays, at about the time of the erection of Lord Ward's shed and the introduction of the power loom. Mr. Simcox used to let Michael help him with the inspection of the carpets off the looms and the grading of them for quality.

Later, in that some shed where he had learnt to weave, he was to put looms of his own. When Tomkinson and Adam were driven out of the Sling by floods they acquired 9 acres of land at Mount Pleasant and concentrated their manufacture there.

*"The firm", Michael said, "was determined to maintain and extend the position they held in the carpet industry, and this could only be done if they worked in a friendly and amicable way; he was deeply grateful to his fellow workers for all the many kindnesses they had shown him, and hoped that in the years to come they would continue to work together for the good of their community and of the firm."* Michael paid sincere tribute to his partner, Mr. William Adam, and drew the company's attention to the military band present to enable dancing to take place for the rest of the evening. He then went on to pay a charming tribute to his spouse, *"Mrs. Tomkinson with them"*, he said, *"was looking as young as ever"*, and he concluded with the words, *"God bless you all and good night"*.

## 1920

The diary started the year as usual, Mr. Bache the bailiff continued to arrange the milk sales from the dairy in Lowe Lane opposite the entry to the stables, Annie still gave the daily instructions to cook, to Fred Willets the coachman, to Mr. Mant the chauffeur, to Mr. Smales the head gardener, who lived in the cottage just round the corner along the Wolverley Road.

Mr. Grooves the master at Franche School was surprised one evening as he came out of school to find Michael with a brush and a pot of dark red paint, painting his own front gates. Passing the time of day with the 79 year old painter he was regaled with the old Dickensian story of Mr. Micawber, income one pound, expenditure nineteen and eleven and you are well off, income one pound and expenditure one pound and one penny and you are in trouble; and that Michael said was the reason he was painting his own front gates, because these were hard times. Annie's grandchild, the author, came to stay, at Franche Hall for a week; Annie much enjoyed her numerous grandchildren, and was seldom without at least one of them. Right up to the end her diary is written firmly and clearly until Monday, February 23rd, when she records a normal sale of 46 eggs, payment to Mrs. Jenkins, and then:

*"Sir W.Hale-White, Dr. Kaufmann, Dr. Addenbrooke, came to see me."* A full time nurse moved in to look after her.

She died on March 8th.

Michael did not survive her for very long and died the following year, but his brother John, broken hearted at losing Michael, lived on until 1924 consoling his final years with such a satisfactory amount of claret that when he died his cellar was quite empty, not only of his own wine, but also it is sadly said of some cases which he had been storing for an acquaintance'

After Michael's death Franche Hall was sold, and subsequently demolished; the site of the house, the gardens, the stables, the greenhouses, and the home farm is now the site of a housing estate.